

SUMMARY OF THE 2013 USDA FARM TO SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM AWARDS

I. INTRODUCTION

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 (Section 243) authorized and funded the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish a farm to school program. As part of HHFKA, the USDA was instructed to develop and administer a farm to school grant program with the purpose of assisting eligible entities in implementing farm to school projects that improve access to local foods in eligible schools. On an annual basis, the USDA is authorized to award up to \$5 million in competitive grants for training, supporting operations, planning, purchasing equipment, developing school gardens, developing partnerships, and implementing farm to school programs. Eligible entities include eligible schools, state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profit entities. In November 2012, the USDA announced its first class of farm to school grantees which included a total of 68 project awards.¹ The total amount awarded was approximately \$4.8 million dollars. Of this total, \$1.3 million was awarded to farm to school planning projects and \$3.5 million was awarded to farm to school implementation projects. The demand for this first round of funding was far greater than the funds available with over \$26.5 million being requested to support a total of 365 projects. (Table 1)

Table 1. Farm to School Dollars Requested and Awarded

Grant Type	Amount Requested	Amount Awarded	Percent of Funds Awarded
Implementation grants	\$21,568,551	\$3,499,287	73%
Planning grants	\$4,978,005	\$1,291,247	27%
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$26,546,556</i>	<i>\$4,790,534</i>	<i>100%</i>

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this summary is to describe common themes and major findings from an analysis of the 68 farm to school projects that were funded by the fiscal year (FY) 2013 USDA Farm to School Grant Program. This analysis helps inform potential and existing farm to school stakeholders about how the USDA Farm to School Grant Program is increasing the consumption of local foods through school meals. This summary is also helpful in that it lays a foundation to support a more thorough evaluation of the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the USDA Farm to School Grant Program (to be completed). Program evaluators and other interested stakeholders will better understand the breadth and depth by which the USDA is supporting farm to school across the U.S.

¹ Referred to as the FY 2013 USDA Farm to School Grant Program awards.

III. METHODOLOGY

As part of the FY 2013 USDA Farm to School Grant Program proposal review process, each volunteer reviewer completed an activity sheet to document the activities outlined in each of the 365 proposed projects. Each of the proposed projects was classified using a set of criteria determined by the USDA Farm to School Program. The criteria ranged to include information about: a) the type of grant and place in which the project takes place, b) the applicant and its primary project partners, c) the farm to school activities included as part of the project, d) major supporting operations and infrastructure purchases of the project, and e) the evaluation methods included to analyze the project's outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Grant proposal reviewers included USDA Farm to School Program personnel, other USDA employees, and employees from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For all implementation grant proposals, reviewers worked together as part of a team of three to four individuals and each team was assigned one team lead. Team leads were responsible for collating the three completed activity sheets and submitting one summary for each team. For planning grants, reviewers simply reviewed the proposals and submitted scores. While these activity sheets were an important part of the proposal review process, they were not used to determine which projects were awarded funding. The completed activity sheets provided a baseline understanding of how each of the proposed projects was supporting the development and growth of local and regional farm to school programs. After the 68 project awards were made, additional criteria were developed to classify each of the projects activities. Additionally, the completed activity sheets from each team were spot checked for accuracy. In total, the following summary is a compilation of the overall findings from the classification process for all of the 68 funded grant projects. While much of the classification was completed for all of the submitted proposals, the results below only represent the farm to school projects that received USDA funding.

IV. RESULTS

a) Farm to School Projects by Type & Location

Of the 68 funded farm to school projects, 32 projects were planning grant awards and 36 projects were implementation grant awards. Sixty five of the sixty eight project awards were given to an individual entity. Three project awards were given to a group of entities. For example in Virginia, three neighboring school districts, Orange County, Page County, and Rappahannock County, submitted a cluster grant to co-develop a long-term farm to school sustainability plan.

The majority of the funded projects (N=37, 54%) were awarded to a school or entity working with a school system that had greater than 70% of the population qualify for free or reduced

school meals. Twenty six (38%) of the funded projects were awarded to a school or entity working with a school system where 50% to 69% of the population qualified for free or reduced school meals. Five awards (7%) were made to a school or entity working with a school system where 0% to 49% of the population qualified for free or reduced school meals. (Table 2)

Table 2. Farm to School Projects by Percent of the Population who Qualify for Free or Reduced School Meals

Percentage of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced School Meals	Total Number of Projects	Total Percent of Projects
Eligibility rate ranging from 70% to 100%	37	54%
Eligibility rate ranging from 50% to 69%	26	38%
Eligibility rate ranging from 0% to 49%	5	7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>100%</i>

Farm to School Grant Program projects were funded in thirty seven different states and Washington, D.C. California schools and organizations received the most awards, six. Four states including Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, and Washington received three awards each. Twelve states received two awards each. Nineteen states each received a single award. Table 12 in the Appendix contains a complete list of project requests and awards by state. The western region of the U.S. submitted and received the highest number of awards, 83 and 14, respectively. The southeast region and the mountain plains region both received eleven awards. The northeast region received ten awards and both the mid-west and mid-Atlantic regions received eight awards. The southwest region received the fewest awards, six. The western region also received the most monies. This was followed by the northeast region, southeast region, mountain plains region, mid-west region, mid-Atlantic region, and southwest region. The appendix contains a map outlining where each of the funded projects is located. (Table 3)

Table 3. Farm to School Project Requests, Awards, and Funding by Region

Applicants by Region	Total Number of Projects Requested	Total Number of Projects Awarded	Percent of Projects Awarded	Total Funds Distributed
Western region	83	14	21%	\$1,040,690
Southeast region	60	11	16%	\$768,484
Mountain Plains region	34	11	16%	\$671,409
Northeast region	44	10	15%	\$783,597
Midwest region	61	8	12%	\$559,358
Mid-Atlantic region	55	8	12%	\$506,941
Southwest region	28	6	9%	\$460,057
<i>Total</i>	<i>365</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>\$4,790,535</i>

b) Farm to School Projects by Applicant & Partnering Entities

Schools received the majority of the awards (N=44, 65%). This was followed by non-profit entities (N=18, 26%), state agencies (N=5, 7%), and Indian tribal organizations (N=1, 1%). Schools also submitted the greatest number of project requests (N=208). This was followed by non-profit entities (N=106) and state agencies (N=25). No awards were made to a group of agricultural producers or a local agency. (Table 4)

Table 4. Farm to School Program Applicants by Entity

Applicant Type	Total Number of Projects Requested	Total Number of Projects Awarded	Percent of Projects Awarded
School	208	44	65%
Nonprofit entity	106	18	26%
State agency	25	5	7%
Agricultural producers	12	0	0%
Local agency	11	0	0%
Indian tribal organization	3	1	1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>365</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>100%</i>

Of the funded projects, project partners were diverse and ranged to include farms and farmers, non-profit entities, food distributors, Cooperative Extension offices, state agencies, local and regional governments, and researchers at colleges and universities. Most of the funded projects included multiple partnering organizations. In total, 74% (N=50) of the funded projects partnered with a school or school system. Half of the funded projects (N=34, 50%) partnered with a non-profit entity. A local Cooperative Extension office was included as a project partner in seventeen of the funded projects (25%). Funded projects included partners representing a farm in 28% (N=19) of the projects. Food distributors were included as project partners in thirteen different projects (19%) and a state agency was included as a project partner in seven different projects (10%). (Table 5)

Table 5. Farm to School Project Partners

Project Partners	Total Number of Projects	Total Percent of Projects
School	50	74%
Nonprofit entity	34	50%
Farm or farmer	19	28%
Cooperative Extension office	17	25%
Distributor	13	19%
State agency	7	10%

A number of outstanding partnerships that holistically support farm to school programming were identified. For example in North Carolina, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project included seven different partners as part of their proposal including child nutrition directors and teachers from three nearby counties, the local North Carolina Cooperative Extension office, the University of North Carolina Asheville Center for Health and Wellness, a local distributor, the National Farm to School Network, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Each of the partnering groups were included to play an important role in creating a more developed (*i.e.*, more schools sourcing more local food) regional farm to school market throughout western North Carolina. In the mid-Atlantic, D.C. Central Kitchen is working with the Washington, D.C. Public School System, a regional food distributor in Virginia, and nine different farm partners across, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia to improve the infrastructure in place around processing, storage, and packaging needs to support D.C. farm to school program growth.

c) Major Farm to School Project Activities

One of the major themes found throughout each of the funded projects was the development of new partnerships or the strengthening of existing partnerships between farm to school stakeholder groups. Over 91% (N=62) of the funded projects support the development of new farm to school partnerships or strengthening of existing farm to school partnerships.

In terms of the planning grant awards, much of the partnership development process was outlined through the creation of farm to school advisory boards, steering committees, or work groups. Approximately 88% of the planning grant awards (N=28) outlined the development of a farm to school advisory board. For example in Spokane, Washington, Cheney Public Schools outlined developing an advisory board made-up of at least six school system-based collaborators and six external collaborators from different farm to school-related organizations. Similarly, in Wisconsin, Sparta Area School District outlined developing a farm to school program planning committee to help expand their farm to school network and support the planning and implementation of local farm to school activities. The majority of the planning grant awards (78%, N=25) outlined the goal of creating a farm to school action or implementation plan to successfully include more local foods in school meals. These action or implementation plans were most often created through the development of an advisory board, completion of a needs assessment, evaluation of local food supply menu options, and the development of farm to school promotional and marketing materials.

One of the major activities that Farm to School grant projects include was training of individuals to support diverse aspects involved with coordinating local and regional farm to school programs. Over two-thirds of the funded projects (N=46, 68%) contained at least one training

aspect. Trainings were related to food service preparation, improved culinary skills, local food procurement practices, improved food safety techniques, or new teaching methods to highlight local and regional food production. Over three fourths of the funded projects (N=54, 79%) include food service training and more than half of the projects (N=69, 57%) include culinary skill development such as menu planning. For example in Oklahoma, Chickasaw Nation Nutrition Services is providing training for school food service directors by partnering with an award winning culinary team known for preparing fresh, healthy foods at Okchamali’s Café in the Chickasaw Nation Medical Center. Almost half of the funded projects (N=33, 49%) include training about procurement of local and regional foods for use in school meals and training about good food safety practices (N=30, 44%). In Nevada, the Nevada Department of Agriculture is focused on improving food safety by training inspectors, farmers, and school garden coordinators in good agricultural practices (GAP) or good handling practices (GHP). Finally, forty percent of the funded projects (N=27) include teacher training to help teachers incorporate in-class and on-farm experiential learning techniques that effectively explain to students where their food comes from, how food is grown, or the benefits and challenges of eating locally grown foods. (Table 6)

Table 6. Farm to School Training by Topic Area

Training Topic Areas	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Food service	54	79%
Culinary skills (<i>e.g.</i> , menu planning, meal preparation skills, cooking skills, <i>etc.</i>)	39	57%
Procurement practices	33	49%
Food safety, food handling, GAP/GHP, <i>etc.</i>	30	44%
Teacher training	27	40%

Many of the funded projects also include activities related to developing school garden programs that grow fresh foods and teach students about local agriculture and food production. The majority of projects include enhancing existing school garden programs (N=37, 54%). Forty percent of the funded projects include developing new school garden programs (N=27, 40%). Additionally, nine projects (13%) include the creation of a hoop house or greenhouse for local food production. In southeast Iowa, Pathfinders Resource Conservation and Development Council is working with the Freemont School to develop a school garden with the goal of encouraging students to explore a career in agriculture and food production. In Maine, Portland Public Schools are expanding school gardens while also developing a school garden manual and school garden strategic plan. Portland Public Schools are also hosting a district-wide school garden summit to share best practices and train individuals to become school garden champions. (Table 7)

Table 7. School Garden Activities

School Garden Activities	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Enhancing an existing school garden program	37	54%
Developing a new school garden program	27	40%
Creating a hoop house or green house	9	13%

Each of the funded projects includes activities related to farm to school program planning and implementation. Almost ninety percent of the funded projects (N=60) include hosting farm to school related meetings that bring together diverse stakeholders to coordinate more local foods going into school meals. Additionally, over three-fourths of the funded projects (N=52) include developing experiential learning programs for students such as farm-based field trips or other agriculture and food-based in-class activities. For example, in Oregon, the Willamette Farm and Food Coalition is implementing a comprehensive farm to school educational program in six schools that includes farm-based field trips, students preparing a snack or meal with food they harvested from a school garden or farm, nutrition lessons, and tastings using local foods.

The majority of funded projects also include developing farm to school promotional materials (N=50, 74%), outreach and promotion to support farm to school program development (N=50, 74%), new product development for inclusion in school menus (N=44, 65%), curriculum development for farm to school activities (N=44, 65%), farm to school research and evaluation activities (N=41, 60%), and activities that involve the parents of students (N=35, 51%). In Massachusetts, Boston Public Schools are refining its district-wide marketing strategy for 'Local Lunch Thursdays' through the development of new farm to school promotional materials in three to five schools. This marketing strategy can then be scaled-up and replicated in other schools throughout the district. As part of their farm to school outreach and promotional strategy, Boston Public Schools are also hosting district-wide events and celebrations to build student awareness about the benefits of eating locally grown fruits and vegetables. Furthermore, in Weld County Public Schools, Colorado, food service directors are developing menus that incorporate locally grown foods and plan to include four permanent locally grown food menu items for use in the 2012-2013 school year.

Nearly half of all funded projects (N=32, 47%) include a component to support the development of new distribution solutions to help schools more easily purchase local foods. In Vermont, the Vermont Department of Agriculture in collaboration with project partners is working with four regional food hubs that service 56 schools to demonstrate best practice models for how food hubs can support farm to school programs and increase the purchasing of local and regional foods. In Minnesota, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) is also focused on improving and developing new distribution solutions that allow for St. Paul Public Schools and

Minneapolis Public Schools to purchase more local and regionally-grown foods. IATP’s work is centered on providing technical assistance and research support to help build relationships between these two school systems and nearby producers, processors, and distributors while documenting opportunities for increased purchasing of local foods. (Table 8)

Table 8. Farm to School Planning and Implementation Activities

Planning and Implementation Activities	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Hosting farm to school meetings	60	88%
Experiential learning activities (<i>e.g.</i> , field trips, in-class activities, <i>etc.</i>)	52	76%
Develop promotional materials (<i>e.g.</i> , brochures, signage, <i>etc.</i>)	50	74%
Outreach and promotion (<i>e.g.</i> , events, media, <i>etc.</i>)	46	68%
New product development for menus	44	65%
Curriculum development	44	65%
Research and evaluation	41	60%
Parental involvement activities	35	51%
Distribution solutions (<i>e.g.</i> , food hubs, partnerships with distributors, <i>etc.</i>)	32	47%
Aggregated buying approaches (<i>e.g.</i> , school based cooperatives, <i>etc.</i>)	20	29%
Value added approaches (<i>e.g.</i> , canning, storing, freezing, <i>etc.</i>)	19	28%
Aggregated supply approaches (<i>e.g.</i> , farmer cooperatives, product aggregation solutions, <i>etc.</i>)	19	28%
Policy development	6	9%

d) Farm to School Project Supporting Operations and Infrastructure Purchases

Many of the funded farm to school projects support staff time so that these individuals can help complete the outlined project activities. Funding was outlined to support farm to school staff or other project staffing needs (N=54, 79%), support an existing farm to school coordinator (N=43, 63%), hire a farm to school project consultant (N=32, 47%), or hire a new farm to school coordinator (N=25, 37%). For example in Maryland, Baltimore City Public Schools requested funds to hire a *Great Kids Farm* coordinator who will play a key role in increasing the quantity of student-grown produce for student consumption, creating safe food handling plans so that school garden produce can be included in school meals safely, and training school personnel in proper safe food handling practices. (Table 9)

Table 9. Farm to School Supporting Operations

Supporting Operations	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Staff support or other staffing needs	54	79%
Support existing farm to school coordinator	43	63%
Hire a project consultant	32	47%
Hire new farm to school coordinator	25	37%

Funded farm to school projects are also supporting the purchasing of agriculture and school-based infrastructure needs to assist in connecting more local foods to school meals. The majority of funded projects support the purchasing of classroom supplies such as farm to school related curriculum, training books, and other local food and farm educational materials (N=38, 56%). The majority of funded projects also support the purchasing of small ticket school kitchen items such as kitchen utensils, canning machines, preservation equipment, dicers, salad spinners, carriers, and small food processors (N=34, 50%). Additionally, funded projects support the purchasing of school garden supplies (N=24, 35%) and larger pieces of school kitchen equipment (N=20, 29%). Furthermore, funded projects also assist in the purchasing of small and large pieces of equipment to boost agricultural production, and small and large pieces of equipment to help increase local food processing, manufacturing, and distribution. Such expenses include the purchasing of coolers, freezers, bag sealers, and storage containers to help support the inclusion of local foods in school meals. (Table 10)

Table 10. Farm to School Infrastructure Purchases

Purchasing of School Based Equipment and/or Supplies	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Classroom supplies (e.g., curriculum tools, etc.)	38	56%
School kitchen supplies (<\$5,000 a unit)	34	50%
School garden supplies (e.g., seeds, shovels, etc.)	24	35%
School kitchen equipment (>\$5,000 a unit)	20	29%
Acquire salad bar(s)	17	25%
Purchasing of Agriculture or Farm Based Equipment and/or Supplies	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Agriculture production supplies (<\$5,000 a unit)	10	15%
Food processing, manufacturing, or distributing equipment (>\$5,000 a unit)	9	13%
Food processing, manufacturing, or distributing equipment (<\$5,000 a unit)	9	13%
Agriculture production supplies (>\$5,000 a unit)	2	3%

e) *Farm to School Project Evaluation Methods*

To evaluate the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the funded projects, project directors plan to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Nearly ninety percent of the projects plan to use quantitative evaluation methods (N=60, 88%) and/or qualitative evaluation methods (N=51, 75%). Project directors also plan to evaluate a number of different outcomes as a result of the projects including an evaluation of individuals (mostly students) change in attitude, knowledge, or behavior (N=40, 59%). Many of the funded projects also plan to examine the economic impacts (N=22, 32%) or health impacts (N=13, 19%) of getting more local foods into school meals. For example as part of a planning grant award in Cleveland, in partnership with the Center for Urban Education at Cleveland State University, the project directors included an evaluation outline to document outcomes related to the procurement and use of local and regional foods in school meals, the development and impact of school gardens on student learning, and the overall effectiveness of different curriculum and instructional techniques on student learning. Additionally, a smaller percentage of the funded projects also plan to document policy changes as a result of the work (N=6, 9%). (Table 11)

Table 11. Proposed Evaluation Methods and General Outcomes/Impacts Measured

Evaluation Methods	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Quantitative methods (<i>e.g.</i> , student surveys, waste audits, <i>etc.</i>)	60	88%
Qualitative methods (<i>e.g.</i> , student interviews, focus groups, <i>etc.</i>)	51	75%
General Outcomes and Impacts Measured	Total Number of Projects	Total Percentage of Projects
Attitude, knowledge, or behavior change	40	59%
Community engagement	31	46%
Economic impact	22	32%
Health impact	13	19%
Policy change	6	9%

A few of the awards (both planning and implementation awards) describe specific goals and set benchmarks for project activities such as increasing the use of local foods in school meals, increasing student participation in experiential learning programs about local food production, elimination of unhealthy food options in schools, or change in students' knowledge and behavior towards eating more healthy food.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Through this analysis several common themes were identified throughout the 2013 Farm to School Grant awards. First, funded projects are taking place across the U.S. and have the potential to transform a school system's ability to implement farm to school initiatives. Second, funded projects are incorporating a wide variety of diverse farm to school activities. Farm to school activities include supporting school garden programs, the development of farm to school promotional and outreach materials, experiential local food and farm learning programs, and training for teachers and food service staff. Third, funded projects are strengthening existing farm to school program partnerships and developing new farm to school partnerships. These collaborations are forming between supply chain stakeholders including farmers, distributors, and schools, as well as with service providers involved with farm to school research and education such as non-profits, state agencies, and local Cooperative Extension offices. Fourth, funded projects are providing resources necessary to allow for individuals to further support farm to school. In conclusion, this analysis outlines the breadth and depth by which the USDA Farm to School Grant Program is working to help increase the use of local foods in school meals.

VI. Appendix

Table 12. Farm to School Project Requests and Awards by State

Applicants by State	Total Number of Projects Awarded	Total Number of Projects Requested	Applicants by State	Total Number of Projects Awarded	Total Number of Projects Requested
Alabama	0	3	Nevada	1	2
Alaska	0	2	New Hampshire	0	1
Arizona	1	4	New Jersey	1	7
Arkansas	2	5	New Mexico	2	6
California	6	49	New York	3	23
Colorado	3	10	North Carolina	3	8
Connecticut	1	2	North Dakota	0	1
Delaware	1	2	Ohio	1	8
Florida	0	11	Oklahoma	1	6
Georgia	3	14	Oregon	2	11
Hawaii	1	7	Pennsylvania	2	14
Idaho	1	1	Rhode Island	0	1
Illinois	1	10	South Carolina	1	6
Indiana	0	2	South Dakota	1	4
Iowa	1	3	Tennessee	1	6
Kansas	0	3	Texas	1	6
Kentucky	2	11	Utah	0	0
Louisiana	0	2	Vermont	1	3
Maine	2	9	Virginia	2	11
Maryland	1	6	Washington	3	8
Massachusetts	3	12	West Virginia	0	1
Michigan	2	11	Wisconsin	2	14
Minnesota	2	15	Wyoming	0	1
Mississippi	1	3	District of Columbia	1	6
Missouri	3	5	Puerto Rico	0	0
Montana	2	7	Virgin Islands	0	1
Nebraska	0	1	<i>Total</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>365</i>

Map 1. Location of Funded Farm to School Projects

