



2023 USDA Farm to School Census

Briefing for State Agencies

April 6, 2023

To hear the briefing, dial: 1-669-254-5252

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Thank you for joining our 2023 USDA Farm to School Census Briefing for State Agencies. First, we will go through a few introductions, some housekeeping rules, and the agenda for today's briefing.



Today's presenters



Natalie Reid, M.P.H. (she/her)



**Chidinma (Chichi) Nwankwo,
M.P.H. (she/her)**



Let's begin with a few introductions—I'll start us off. My name is Natalie Reid. I am a research analyst at Mathematica, and my pronouns are she, her, and hers. My name is Chidinma Nwankwo, I am also a research analyst at Mathematica, and my pronouns are she, her, and hers.

Mathematica is a research and data analytics consultancy, and we are driven by a mission to improve well-being for communities. We have partnered with Decision Information Resources, or DIR, who provides expert research, evaluation, data collection, and technical assistance to measure program effectiveness, make evidence informed decisions, and improved results as well as the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to bring you today's briefing on the 2023 Farm to School Census.



Housekeeping

- / Attendees have been automatically muted upon entry
- / To ask a question, use the question and answer (Q&A) tab and type directly into the box
- / Reminder: This briefing will be recorded and available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/2023-farm-school-census-partner-resources>



Let's go over a few housekeeping rules for today's briefing. Attendees have been automatically muted upon entry to maximize the best possible sound quality.

If you have questions throughout the briefing presentation and you are using a computer, you can use the question and answer—or Q&A—tab and type directly into that box, not the chat. Take a few seconds to identify the Q&A tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen. You can submit your questions here anytime during the briefing, but we will be compiling them and answering them all at the end of the presentation during the Q&A session.

As a reminder, this briefing is being recorded and will be available over the coming weeks on the FNS website for farm to school census partner resources which is listed on the screen.



Agenda

1. Background on the Farm to School Census
2. The 2023 Farm to School Census
3. Question and answer (Q&A) session



The purpose of this briefing webinar is to introduce State Agencies, Regional Offices, and partners to the 2023 Farm to School Census and make sure you have all the information you need ahead of the Census launch in fall 2023. We will be holding a second briefing for SFAs and partners in the fall.

First, we will go through some background information on the Farm to School Census, including what the Census is, why it is being conducted, how data is used, and some findings from the last Census in 2019. Then, we will discuss the new 2023 Farm to School Census, including topics covered, the role of State agencies, and guidance school food authorities will need to complete the Census. Lastly, we will have a Q&A session to answer any questions you might have.



Background on the Farm to School Census

First, we have some background on the Farm to School Census, including what it is, why we conduct it, how all of us can use the data, and some key findings from the 2019 Census.



What is the Farm to School Census?

The Farm to School Census is a survey that provides information about how school food authorities (SFAs) are participating in farm to school activities.



The Farm to School Census is a survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to better understand farm to school activities occurring within school food authorities, or SFAs. The Census is designed to take place every four years, with prior Censuses taking place in 2012, 2015, and most recently, 2019. The 2023 Census is the fourth census conducted by FNS.



Why do we conduct the Farm to School Census?

- / Snapshot of farm to school activities
- / Identify opportunities for farm to school expansion and barriers to participation
- / Resource for SFAs, States and localities, and the federal government



7

The Farm to School Census provides a national snapshot of farm to school activities such as local food purchasing and use of edible school gardens. It gives the “big picture” of how farm to school is operating across all SFAs in the country and because we regularly collect this data every four years, shows how farm to school is growing and maturing over time.

Data collected from the Census helps identify opportunities for expanding farm to school activities in SFAs and States as well as the challenges of participating in farm to school. It helps FNS, State agencies, and partners prioritize what they can do to support SFAs who want to source local foods, provide food and agriculture education, and engage in other farm to school activities.

As such, the Census is a resource for SFAs, States, and other entities, through national statistics, materials about farm to school that FNS produces, and State and SFA-level data that is provided on the Farm to School website where school staff, community members, and others can see their SFA’s responses.



How many SFAs responded to the 2019 Census?

- / Nearly 19,000 SFAs received the 2019 Census
- / 12,634 SFAs completed the 2019 Census
- / 67% response rate

We are aiming for a

80%

response rate in 2023!

Source: Bobronnikov, E., S. Prenovitz, and L.M.B. Yadav. "2019 Farm to School Census Report." Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, July 2021.

8

Out of the nearly 19,000 SFAs that were sent the 2019 Census, 12,634 completed it, for a response rate of 67%. This was such a great feat and we're hoping that with your help, we can have a response rate of 80 percent for the 2023 Census.

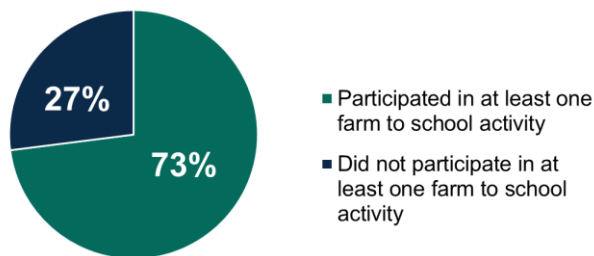


What did we learn from the 2019 Farm to School Census?

We learned a variety of things from the 2019 Farm to School Census.



Nearly three-quarters of SFAs participated in at least one farm to school activity in SY 2019–2020



Source: Bobronnikov, E., S. Prenovitz, and L.M.B. Yadav. "2019 Farm to School Census Report." Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, July 2021.

10

73 percent of SFAs participated in at least one farm to school activity in the 2019–2020 school year. Participation was determined based on whether SFAs reported participating in at least one of any 30 distinct farm to school activities such as educational activities like taste tests, edible school gardens, or field trips to farms as well as serving local foods.



How much money did SFAs spend on local foods in SY 2019–2020?

\$1.26 billion

Source: Bobronnikov, E., S. Prenovitz, and L.M.B. Yadav. "2019 Farm to School Census Report." Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, July 2021.

11

How much money do you think SFAs spent on local foods in SY 2019-2020? Feel free to put your guesses in the chat!

SFAs that participated in farm to school activities reported spending a total of \$1.26 billion dollars on local foods, not including foods purchased through USDA Foods and the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (or USDA DoD Fresh).



What benefits of participation did farm to school SFAs most frequently identify?

- / Higher-quality foods
- / Increased student knowledge about local and healthy foods
- / Increased consumption of items in schools



Source: Bobronnikov, E., S. Prenovitz, and L.M.B. Yadav. "2019 Farm to School Census Report." Report submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Rockville, MD: Abt Associates, July 2021.

12

In addition, farm to school SFAs most frequently perceived higher-quality foods, increased student knowledge about local and healthy foods, and increased consumption of items in schools as benefits of their participation in the program.



Census findings in action

- / Findings help identify places where SFAs and partners can use more support
 - Highlighting need for TA and resources to facilitate direct market connections, support rural SFAs
- / [Farm to School Census website highlights SFA and State activities](#)



13

As we discussed before, findings can help identify places where SFAs and partners might be able to use additional support. One thing learned from prior Censuses is that most schools source local food through intermediaries like distributors, USDA Foods, and USDA DoD Fresh. Because of that, there was an opportunity for FNS to shift some technical assistance resources towards supporting or facilitating more direct market connections for producers. Similarly, findings that showed differences in farm to school activity in urban, suburban and rural SFAs encouraged FNS to prioritize rural SFAs for certain resources.

We also make Census results available on an easy-to-use website. Once the slides are available, you can click on the link from here. Visitors can see responses of individual SFAs, look at the answers to questions for various types of SFAs, and see results at the State and national level. Farm to school practitioners and supporters can use this information in their own farm to school planning.



The 2023 Farm to School Census

Now we'll discuss the new 2023 Farm to School Census. It will collect data on the 2022–2023 school year and will be fielded in the 2023–2024 school year.



What changes did FNS make to improve the 2023 Census?

- / Minor updates to reflect current research needs, provide clarity, and streamline data collection
- / FNS added new questions to collect more detail about current issues in farm to school
 - Challenges and technical assistance needs
 - Characteristics of local items purchased
 - Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on procurement
- / FNS removed and combined questions



You might be wondering how the 2023 Census differs from the 2019 Census. It is generally the same as the 2019 census with a few minor changes to reflect current research needs, provide clarity, and streamline data collection. FNS made all updates with an eye to ensuring that the questions between the 2019 and 2023 Censuses are comparable and feasible for SFAs to complete.

In some places, FNS added new questions to collect more detail about current issues in farm to school. For example, questions now assess challenges and technical assistance needs, the characteristics of local foods, and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

FNS also removed some questions and combined others to be efficient and make sure the Census was collecting only what was absolutely needed. For example, we changed the way we ask for local purchasing data to make it easier to provide.



What topics does the 2023 Farm to School Census cover?

- / Participation in farm to school activities
- / Details on activities conducted in SY 2022–2023, including spending on local foods
- / Perspectives on benefits and challenges of farm to school
- / Basic information about the SFA



More specifically, these are the high-level topics that the 2023 Farm to School Census covers. First is participation in farm to school activities over time. The Census asks whether the SFA has participated in or plans to participate in various farm to school activities; if they no longer participate, the reasons why; and if they plan to participate in the future, when they plan to start. For example, this includes questions about whether SFAs use local foods in the various programs they participate in, if they work with local food producers, if they have an edible school garden, or if they integrate farm to school activities such as taste tests and field trips into their cafeterias and classrooms.

The Census also covers details on activities conducted in the 22-23 school year, including spending on local foods. For example, we ask about how much an SFA spent in dollars on all food and local foods, what types of local items they purchased most frequently, and the sources they purchased from.

Perspectives on benefits and challenges includes questions that cover various outcomes associated with farm to school activities and challenges that SFAs might face with procuring local products (for example, the cost) as well as what types of supports might make farm to school easier.

The Census will also cover basic information about the SFA. This will include, for example, other programs that SFAs participated in, such as the School Breakfast Program or the Summer Food Service Program; the number of schools in an SFA; and how the SFA defines “local” school food procurement.



Who should complete the 2023 Farm to School Census?

SFAs that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)



17

Now that you know a bit more about the content of the 2023 Farm to School Census, let's talk about who should complete it.

Every SFA that participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) should complete the Census. Even if the school is not currently buying any local food or doing anything related to farm to school, it should still complete the Census. We are especially interested in SFAs who do not participate in farm to school and the reasons they share for why they are not participating because this can be helpful information when considering how to better support SFAs and what technical support materials might be most useful. It also helps us paint a full picture of the farm to school activity happening among all SFAs that operate the National School Lunch Program and who might be more or less likely to participate in farm to school.

In terms of who specifically should be responding to the Census, we will send the survey link directly to the SFA director, who will likely be the best fit. They may need to and are encouraged to reach out to other folks in their school community (such as classroom teachers or other staff who lead edible school gardens or educational activities or even staff in the business office or a food service management company) who may have more precise information about the various Census questions. SFA

directors will be able to share the link to the survey with anyone else who should directly respond to questions. They will be able to open the survey and navigate to particular sections.



When will the Census take place?



SFAs will receive a survey invitation link by email from Decision Information Resources (DIR).

18

The Census will open in early October 2023 for respondents to start completing the survey. SFAs will receive a link directly from DIR.



We need YOU to make the 2023 Census a success!



19

The Farm to School Census can't happen without the help of our State agency partners. We depend on you to help us create the list of SFAs to contact, alert SFAs about the Census, and encourage participation. In 2019, our State agency partners did an amazing job to encourage SFAs to respond to the Census, and we hope to do even better in 2023. We know that many of you rely on the information collected by the Census to better understand what's happening with farm to school in your state and we are working to make the 2023 data even more useful at the State level. Please keep in mind that the more SFAs in your state that respond, the more useful that data will be. Hearing from more SFAs means that we have the best possible snapshot of farm to school in the country and your state, which helps us all as we work to better understand, support and make the case for farm to school.



How you can help with the SFA contact list for the 2023 Census

1

Compile a list of your State's SFA directors and their contact information and send to the Census team by May 31, 2023*

2

Review the draft SFA contact list the Census team sends in late summer/early fall 2023 and update in case there has been SFA staff turnover

3

Respond to requests from the Census team to update contact information after we send out the survey

*In mid-April 2023, you will receive a request for SFA contact information, including contact names, titles, phone numbers, email addresses, and mailing addresses for all SFAs in your State or territory who participate in the National School Lunch Program.

There are two main things we need your help with so that we can get the best possible picture of farm to school activity in this Census. First is updating the SFA contact list so that we can reach out to SFAs, which is what we'll discuss on this slide. The second is encouraging SFAs to complete the Census, which we'll discuss on the next slide.

For the contact list, first we need you all to submit contact information for SFAs to the Census team so we can create an SFA contact list. More specifically, in mid April 2023, you will receive a request for SFA contact information—including their names, titles, phone numbers, email addresses, and mailing addresses—for all SFAs in your State or territory who participate in the National School Lunch Program. We ask that you submit the information by May 31, 2023. We'll provide an Excel template that you can use to submit the contact information to us, however, using the template is not required, so sending your own data file with the information is fine. You can submit data via email which will be outlined in the request we send.

Second, we know that there can be a lot of turnover in SFA staff between school years, so we will send you the draft contact list in late summer or early fall of 2023 and ask you to review it. It would be great if you could provide updated SFA contact

information if SFA staff turnover has occurred over the summer. For example, if you submitted your contact list in early May 2023 and you learn that an SFA director at one of the districts in your State retired at the end of the school year, we would like you to update the contact information in our draft list. For updating the draft list, you can do it directly or you can provide us with a new document with all of your SFAs' contact information—whichever option is easiest for you.

Third, after we launch the Census, we may reach out to you if we receive email bounce backs or learn that phone numbers provided are not in service. It will be really helpful if you can respond in a timely manner to any inquiries we send to make sure we can get the Census to the right people.



How you can help support SFA participation in the Census

Share the 2023 Census Worksheet with SFAs early

Send an introductory email and two reminder emails to SFAs

Have our website, FAQs, and contact information available to share with SFAs

Encourage SFAs to participate

21

Again, we are hopeful that you can help us encourage SFAs to complete the Census. There are four key steps that we think would really help support participation!

First, we recommend sharing the 2023 Census Worksheet with SFAs early on so they have ample time to collect the information and consult with whomever they need to in order to complete the Census. As we mentioned, the 2023 Census will ask very similar questions to 2019. We know that some SFAs want to get started pulling information together as soon as possible, but since the web survey will not be open until fall 2023, this tool can help them organize and structure some of their information, so they feel prepared and have an easier time completing the survey when it is available. We will walk through this worksheet in a minute.

Second, we will ask you to send three emails about the Census in Fall 2023. The first will be an introductory email to SFAs to announce the Census in late September, right before the Census goes live. Then in early November and late November or December, we will ask you to send reminder emails. For both reminder emails we will send you a template email. We'll also give you a list of SFAs that have not yet responded so that you're not including SFAs who have already responded to the census in your outreach.

SFAs may come to you with questions before the launch of the survey and while it is open, so it would be great if you could have our website, frequently asked questions document, and study team contact information readily available should SFAs reach out to you with any questions. We do not expect that you will answer all of the questions that an SFA might have! The email address and toll-free number will be really helpful for SFAs if the FAQs do not answer their question.

Lastly, we would love if you could encourage SFAs to participate in general. On the next slide we will share some of the ways that the Community Food Systems National Office will help support you to reach out to SFAs and encourage participation. We may also ask some State agencies for your help reaching out to certain large SFAs in your state that we want to make sure participate and are represented in the 2023 Census.



National Office Support for State agency outreach

/ 2023 Census Resource Page: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/2023-farm-school-census-partner-resources>

- Quick Facts sheet for State Agencies

/ And coming soon:

- Census FAQs
- Census Worksheet
- Reference copy of the survey
- PPT slides
- Checklist for Success to share with SFAs
- Census theme art and graphics

22

The Community Food Systems Division (CSFD) National Office will be offering support to State agencies to promote the Census to their SFAs, both preparing them to participate and encouraging completion once the survey has been released in October.

We have created a website to house key resources, which so far include a quick facts sheet for State agencies to use in answering questions about the Census. The website will also have Census FAQs, the Census worksheet (which we'll talk about next), a copy of the full survey instrument so SFAs can see all questions in advance, and recordings and slides from this briefing and, as we mentioned earlier, the briefing we will do for SFAs in the fall.

Other materials are anticipated to include slides that can be inserted into a PPT presentation to highlight high-level information about the Census, a "Checklist for Success" to share with SFAs to help them prepare for and complete the Census, and Census theme art and graphics to use in promotions. The materials will be added to the website in the next few months.

In 2019, some State agencies also used strategies like mentioning the Census in

newsletters for SFAs, posting about the Census in their social media channels, and even holding a raffle that SFAs could enter by completing their Census. We encourage you to get as creative as you'd like! We plan to share ideas for activities and resources to support you to do them in the fall.



Overview of the 2023 Census Worksheet

- / How many schools participated in various farm to school activities
- / How many staff spent time on farm to school activities
- / How much money the SFA spent on food overall and local food

For SY 2022-23, please indicate if your SFA procured local foods using any of the following sources, and if so, what percent of your local purchasing (based on the dollars spent) came from each of the sources you selected.

Source for local foods	Used this source? Y/N	Percentage of local spending
Directly from an individual food producer (i.e., farmer, rancher, fisher), including but not limited to a farmers' market or CSA model		
Directly from a cooperative ¹ of producers (i.e., farmers, ranchers or fishers)		
Directly from a local food processor or manufacturer		
Food hub ²		
Grocery store		
School or community garden/farm		
Produce distributor		
Broadline distributor		
USDA DoD Fresh Program ³		
USDA Foods ⁴		
Other:		

The following questions ask how much money your SFA spent on food and local food during SY 2022-23.

Spending	Amount Spent
Total food spending (NOT including USDA Foods or DoD Fresh)	
Spending on local food, including fluid milk (NOT including USDA Foods or DoD Fresh)	
Spending on local fluid milk	
Total spending on USDA Foods (NOT including USDA DoD Fresh)	
Spending on local foods through USDA Foods (NOT including USDA DoD Fresh)	

One of the resources that we will make available on the website is a Farm to School Census Worksheet. It is an optional resource designed to help respondents gather some of the information they will need to respond to the Census. Though the worksheet does not cover all of the information needed for the Census, it will assist them in completing the survey more quickly, as they can use this tool to note information from schools, other departments, staff, or vendors before they begin the Census. Any work done on the worksheet is “scratch notes” and responses are not considered to be official unless they are submitted into the web survey.

The Census worksheet includes questions about the number of schools that participated in various farm to school activities, how many staff spent time on farm to school activities, and details about their local food purchases. For example, looking at the right of the screen, we can see the part of the worksheet that will ask SFAs to note the sources of any local foods they purchased and how much they spent on all food and local foods.

Again, the purpose of the worksheet is to help respondents answer some of the major questions that will be in the Census, especially those that might require them to consult with schools, other departments, staff, or vendors. The questions on

purchasing data might be especially tricky for SFAs, so filling out the worksheet in advance could make this section of the Census much easier for SFAs to complete. As mentioned, we will also have the full text of the survey available in advance so that SFAs can see all the questions they will be asked.



Guidance for completing the Census



Respondents can complete the Census on a computer, smartphone, or tablet.



The Census does not need to be completed all at once.



The Census will take around 30 minutes to complete.

We recommend respondents consult with their farm to school partners (such as vendors, school garden coordinators, food service staff, or teachers) and can directly share the Census survey link with them to answer questions. Anyone can access the survey using this link, but only one person can be in the survey at a time.

Now, let's walk through some guidance for completing the Census.

Respondents can complete the Census on a computer, smartphone, or tablet.

It does not need to be completed all at once. An SFA director can answer a few questions, save their responses, close out of the survey, and return to complete it. This is particularly useful if they find they cannot initially answer a few questions—they can check in with others as needed and return to those questions. In fact, we recommend they consult with their farm to school partners like vendors or teachers to get the most accurate information on their various activities. They can share their Census survey link directly with other people to have them answer questions. For example, if they think a vendor or teacher might be best able to answer a section, they can share the survey link with them to have them complete that section. It is important to note, however, that only one person can be in the survey at a time.

The time needed to complete the Census will vary. SFAs that don't participate in any farm to school activities may need as little as five minutes. On average, we anticipate the survey to take around 30 minutes to complete.



Guidance for completing the Census (continued)



SFAs should answer questions as best as they can.



SFAs that are having trouble completing the survey or are unsure about who should complete the survey should call or email the study team.

SFAs should answer the questions as best as they can. If they do not have exact numbers but are able to give best estimates (for example, an estimate of the amount of money spent on local foods), that is acceptable. Having an estimate is better than not putting anything at all!

Finally, SFAs that are having trouble completing the survey, or SFA directors who do not know much about farm to school in their district and are unsure about who should complete the survey, can reach out to the study team. The team's contact information will be available at the end of this slide deck and is also available in the FAQs handout.



Thanks for supporting Farm to School!



“The expansion of Farm to School is more important than ever for our kids. When schools and local producers work together, children benefit from higher quality foods on their plates and program operators have stable sources for the products they need.”

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack



We just want to say thank you so much for supporting Farm to School! We’ve included a quote here from Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack that says: “The expansion of Farm to School is more important than ever for our kids. When schools and local producers work together, children benefit from higher-quality foods on their plates and program operators have stable sources for the products they need.”

The Census is a key tool in supporting the growth and expansion of farm to school across the U.S. and we really, truly appreciate all the support you provide in this process and your commitment to making the 2023 Census a success. Again, thank you so much for supporting Farm to School and the Census!



Question & Answer Session



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Now we'll discuss the questions you entered in the Q&A box. Feel free to continue adding questions as we discuss.



Next steps

- / Please submit information for the contact list by May 31, 2023
- / Additional questions? For more information, contact:
 - Email: Farm2SchoolCensus@dir-online.com or amy.rosenthal@usda.gov
 - Toll-free phone number: 866-986-2230

28

Thank you again for attending today's webinar and asking such great questions! As a reminder of next steps, the Census study team will be sending out a request later this month for contact list information. Please submit that information by May 31, 2023.

If you have additional questions about the 2023 Census and how you can help support SFA participation, please feel free to reach out to the Census study team using the study email or phone number on the screen. You can also reach out to Amy Rosenthal at FNS, whose email address is also listed on the screen. Again, this information is also available in the FAQs document. We very much appreciate your help with fielding the 2023 Farm to School Census and look forward to collaborating with you all!