

Colorado Department of Education
School Nutrition Unit

FARM TO SCHOOL ROADMAP

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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



COLORADO
Department of Education
School Nutrition

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GLOSSARY

COLORADO SCHOOL NUTRITION ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

CDA	Colorado Department of Agriculture
School Nutrition	...	Colorado Department of Education School Nutrition Unit
CACFP	.....	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CEP	.....	Community Eligibility Provision
HSMA	.....	Healthy School Meals for All
LEA	.....	Local Education Agency
LFP	.....	Colorado Local Food Program
NSLP	.....	National School Lunch Program
SBP	.....	School Breakfast Program
SFA	.....	School Food Authority
SFSP	.....	Summer Food Service Program
SY	.....	School Year (used in the format SY 2022-23)
USDA	.....	United States Department of Agriculture

SCHOOL FOOD AND NUTRITION TERMINOLOGY

District: Governmental entities that operate schools and provide public educational services within a set geographic area.¹ There are 179 school districts in Colorado as of SY 25-26.

Food insecurity: Households cannot acquire enough food, or nutritionally adequate foods, to meet the needs of all their members due to insufficient money or resources during some part of the year.²

Sponsor: Organizations that manage food sites.³ Sponsors enter into agreements with state agencies and receive reimbursements for eligible meals and snacks served. Examples include public or private non-profit school food authorities, including charter schools, Residential Child Care Institutions, Bureau of Indian affairs, or state educational agencies.⁴

Sites: The physical location where meals are served.⁵ Examples include schools, parks, and recreation centers.

School Food Authority: The entity responsible for administering nutrition programs at one or more schools.⁶ May be a school district, consortium of districts, individual school, or another approved entity.



FORWARD

A Decade of Commitment to Community Nutrition

Danielle Bock, Director of Nutrition Services, Greeley-Evans School District 6

For me, this work is more than a professional endeavor; it is the realization of a profoundly personal vision that was ignited many years ago as a food banker in Washington State, where I was able to bring the Feeding Washington collaboration to fruition. My journey in Weld County began when I served as the Food Resource Manager at the Weld Food Bank, where my core mission was connecting abundance with need. That mission crystallized the day I first collaborated with the then-District 6 Nutrition Services Director to lay the groundwork for a revolutionary idea: a collaborative food hub where we could collect, process, and distribute farm-fresh produce directly into our programs. That initial spark—the desire to move beyond non-perishables and provide genuinely nutritious, locally-sourced food—has been the driving force of my career ever since, ultimately leading me to my current role as the Director of Nutrition Services for District 6.

The food hub we seeded evolved into the thriving Farm to School Program we now operate, growing from a few hundred dollars' worth of cherry tomatoes to purchasing over \$1 million annually in local produce and proteins. While that local success is deeply rewarding and demonstrates the immense potential of community-driven nutrition, my first-hand experience has also continuously exposed the vast, systemic cracks that still allow food insecurity to persist across the state. We've constantly navigated logistical hurdles, funding constraints, and systemic difficulties that prevent our successful models from being easily or equitably replicated. This history has instilled in me a deep, practical understanding of *what is possible* and, more importantly, *what must change* at a policy level.

This dedication and hard-won knowledge are precisely why I stand firmly behind the comprehensive proposal that follows. This Roadmap is not a document of our past victories, but a vital blueprint for the future. It moves us past single solutions toward addressing the systemic failures exposed on the front lines, translating potential into guaranteed, high-quality access for every child in our state, regardless of their zip code. **My commitment is to provide the legitimacy and driving force necessary to ensure this roadmap transitions from paper to practice, securing sustainable and scalable strategies for our future.**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A recurring theme throughout the Roadmapping process was recognition of the immense amount of work done by school teams, including school nutrition professionals, administrators, and teachers, to provide safe and nutritious meals for thousands of students each day.

Colorado schools collectively served more than 100 million meals in SY 2023-24.⁷ The school nutrition professionals who plan, prepare, and serve these meals do so while navigating persistent challenges such as supply chain disruptions, limited time, infrastructure constraints, and complex menu planning. Despite these considerations, they deliver essential nutrition that reduces food insecurity, improves student nutrition and wellbeing, and strengthens academic outcomes.

This Roadmapping project is grounded in the perspectives of school districts and school nutrition professionals. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the process, and all the school nutrition professionals who dedicate their time and expertise each day to nourishing Colorado students.

EXTERNAL EVALUATOR

After completing the Roadmapping root cause and solutions sessions, School Nutrition partnered with Colorado State University (CSU) to serve as an external evaluator for the analysis and report process. Working closely with the School Nutrition team, the CSU team analyzed Roadmapping results, reviewed national best practices, examined USDA Farm to School Census results, and explored Colorado school district case studies to develop the recommendations outlined in this report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY A ROADMAP?

In 2023, the Colorado Department of Education School Nutrition Unit embarked on a multi-year Roadmapping process designed to gather community knowledge and perspectives on advancing farm to school procurement in Colorado. The resulting report reflects the contributions of more than 170 statewide participants, including school nutrition professionals, producers, state agencies, aggregators, and nonprofits from rural and urban Colorado.

The report presents findings from a root cause analysis process which dug deeper into barriers to farm to school procurement as well as findings from solutions-based sessions aimed at addressing the challenges identified. These sessions, along with analysis of nationwide and statewide best practices, guided the development of corresponding recommendations for School Nutrition.

At the heart of farm to school work is a shared vision of school food not only as a source of nourishment, but also as a means of building stronger, more connected communities. The solutions generated through the Roadmapping process reflect this vision, offering pathways for continued growth while celebrating the meaningful progress already underway in schools, state agencies, nonprofits, and farming communities across Colorado.

Farm to school initiatives are most effective when communities collaborate, sharing ideas, strategies, and action. This Roadmap is intended to support these efforts, providing clear direction for School Nutrition and serving as a shared resource that makes the expertise and deep knowledge of statewide school nutrition experts, producers, and partners widely accessible.

Five overarching priorities emerged from analysis of Roadmapping conversations and a review of ongoing farm to school initiatives and best practices:

1) Education and Training

Preparing local foods requires extensive culinary training and workforce development in scratch cooking, as well as knowledge on seasonality and advance menu planning. Education is also needed to strengthen awareness of the needs and barriers of farm to school partners, and demonstrate the benefits of farm to school initiatives.

Recommendation 1: Expand peer-to-peer learning opportunities grounded in Colorado experience.

Recommendation 2: Pilot a Farm to School Institute.

Recommendation 3: Support student engagement in school meal programs.

2) Procurement Processes & Tools

Roadmapping participants highlighted that initial barriers to local purchasing can be high, including identifying regional producers, navigating delivery logistics, and accommodating seasonality in menu planning. However, the idea of “starting small” and gradually incorporating more local foods emerged consistently as a simple yet effective way to build familiarity, establish trust, and demystify the process within available budgets.

Food hubs and aggregators were also frequently cited as key partners in easing procurement processes, minimizing logistics and coordination required from both producers and school districts. These partnerships, along with simple, practical resources such as forecasting tools and local-specific contracts, represented popular solutions to streamline procurement processes.

Recommendation 1: Maintain and expand Source Local Food page on CDE School Nutrition website to ensure access to School Nutrition tools and services.

Recommendation 2: Integrate risk mitigation into CDE connection events.

Recommendation 3: Streamline farm to school data collection.

Recommendation 4: Provide education that supports partnerships that strengthen procurement to drive up the scale of local purchases.

3) Infrastructure and Capacity

Infrastructure to support local procurement emerged as a critical leverage point for both producers and school nutrition professionals. Priorities include increasing processing and value-added options, supporting expanded delivery routes, and improving kitchen cold storage and workspace to accommodate local foods.

Equally important are corresponding increases in staff capacity. Roadmapping participants shared a desire to avoid burnout among school nutrition professionals, who already face significant demands on their time and resources. Increasing staff numbers and retention, dedicating positions to farm to school, offering expanded culinary training, and providing wage increases were among the recommended ways to acknowledge and support the added responsibilities associated with local food preparation.

Recommendation 1: Enhance farm to school program infrastructure by supporting efforts to secure dedicated coordination capacity at the district or regional level.

Recommendation 2: Leverage state and federal funds for kitchen equipment, processing, and storage infrastructure.

4) Relationships and Culture

Community building efforts around farm to school initiatives emerged as both essential to the long-term success of local procurement and as a key benefit of farm to school programming.

There was broad agreement on the value of celebrating local food in school meals, fostering understanding of nutrition and agriculture, and building community. Local procurement was also seen as an opportunity to strengthen relationships among producers, aggregators, school nutrition professionals, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Recommendation 1: Celebrate and communicate farm to school success.

Recommendation 2: Facilitate producer-district relationship building.

5) Funding and Resources

The Roadmapping root cause and solutions-based listening sessions demonstrated the continued need for targeted funding to support local procurement, recognizing that school administrators balance many important budget priorities and school nutrition professionals must provide consistent meals regardless of where food comes from. Important funding priorities include infrastructure, workforce training, and staff support.

Resource challenges faced by producers were also identified as barriers during the Roadmapping process. In some conversations, school district concerns around perceived supply and availability were linked to an awareness of barriers that Colorado producers face accessing land and water, on-farm processing capacity, and food safety certification options.

Each of these barriers represents not only a priority for School Nutrition to address, but also an area of ongoing work. Both School Nutrition and partners across the state, from individual schools and producers to statewide nonprofits and food hubs, are already engaged in meaningful efforts to advance progress in each of these topic areas.

Recommendation 1: Align statewide funding priorities.

Recommendation 2: Continue to pursue federal and state funding for Colorado-grown food and infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SCHOOL NUTRITION UNIT

FARM TO SCHOOL PROCUREMENT AS A KEY STRATEGY

School meals have immediate and long-term impacts on student health, well-being, and academic success, making them a powerful tool for supporting student outcomes and creating more equitable educational environments.⁸ Farm to school procurement has the potential to magnify these impacts by increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, connecting students with agriculture and nutrition, and providing markets for Colorado farmers and ranchers.^{9,10,11}

The Colorado Department of Education School Nutrition Unit works across initiatives to expand access to healthy school meals with an emphasis on farm to school local procurement.

In 2019, the Local Food Program Pilot (LFP), established through HB 1132, allocated \$500,000 a year for SFAs to purchase Colorado grown and raised foods beginning in school year SY 2021-22. This program, administered through CDE, has served as a valuable model for expanding local food purchasing in schools. The program helped to build strong partnerships across the farm to school value chain and demonstrated the appetite for local products in schools. In SY 2023-24, Colorado SFAs spent approximately \$2.2 million on local foods, up significantly from \$1.36 million the previous year.¹²

This growing momentum was reinforced by the 2022 passage of Healthy School Meals for All (HSMA), a statewide ballot measure establishing universal free school meals for Colorado public school students. This legislation incorporated the Local Food Pilot Program, along with associated technical assistance and training for scratch cooking and local procurement, and wage increases for front-line school nutrition professionals, into a comprehensive program to support nutritious school meal programs.

Colorado's commitment to farm to school is reflected in reporting at the national level, with the 2023 USDA Farm to School Census indicating that 68% of Colorado SFAs report serving local foods.¹³ Building on this progress, School Nutrition continues to support SFAs as they expand farm to school procurement, engage students in agriculture and nutrition, and invest in partnerships with Colorado farmers and ranchers.

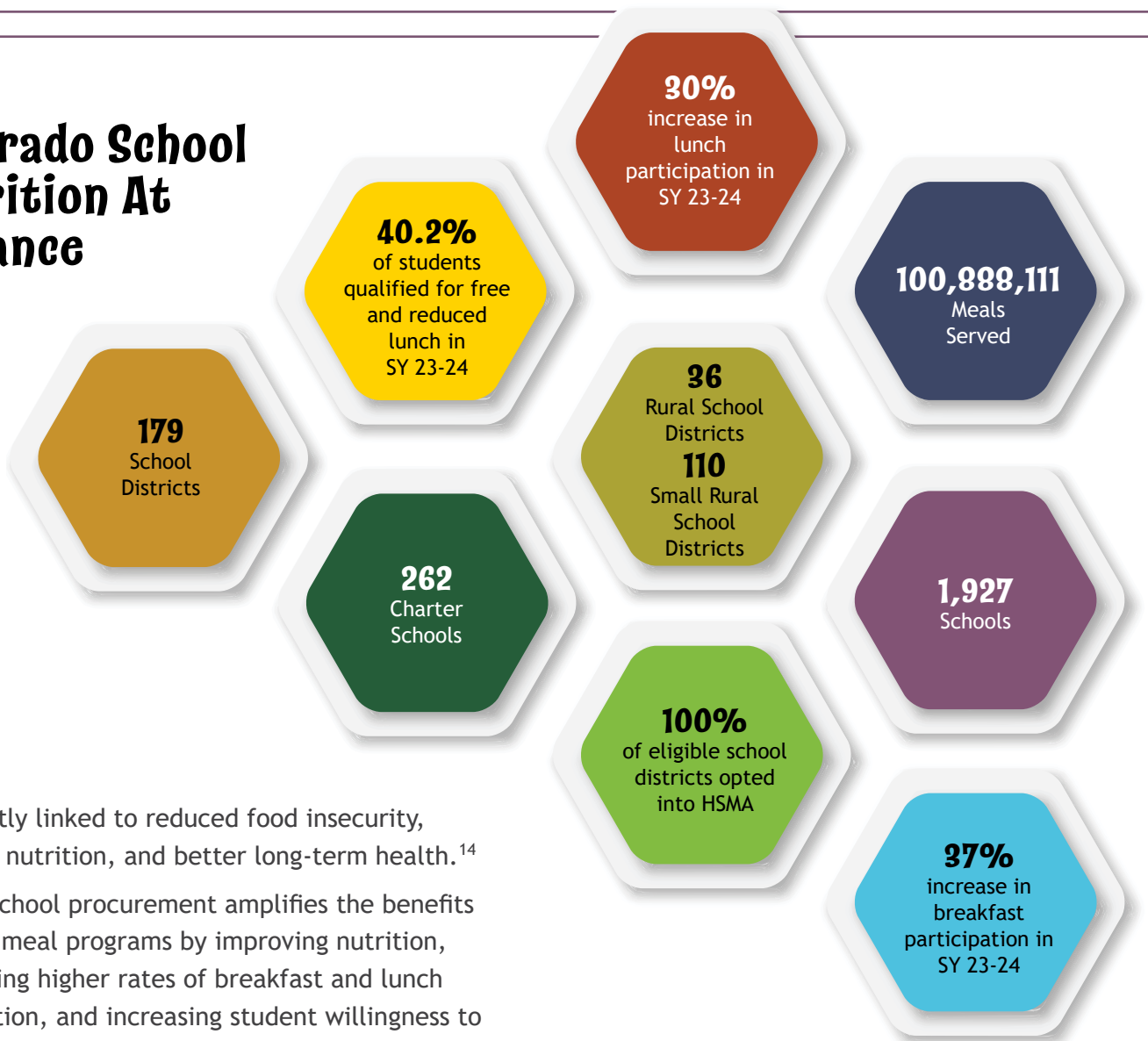


WHY FARM TO SCHOOL PROCUREMENT?

SUPPORTING COLORADO STUDENTS

Participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) is

Colorado School Nutrition At A Glance



consistently linked to reduced food insecurity, improved nutrition, and better long-term health.¹⁴

Farm to school procurement amplifies the benefits of school meal programs by improving nutrition, encouraging higher rates of breakfast and lunch participation, and increasing student willingness to try fresh fruits and vegetables.¹⁵ A 2020 literature review of nationwide farm to school activities and student outcomes found that “studies consistently show positive impacts on food and nutrition-related knowledge; most studies also suggest a

positive relation between farm to school activities and healthy food selection during school meals, nutrition self-efficacy, and willingness to try fruit and vegetables.”¹⁶



In Colorado, SFAs responding to the 2023 USDA Farm to School Census reported a 58% increase in both consumption of fruits and vegetables and access to better quality foods due to farm to school participation.¹⁷

GROWING RURAL ECONOMIES

Farm to school procurement has the potential to support Colorado agriculture through consistent, high-volume market channels. In SY 2023-24, Colorado schools served over 100 million meals.¹⁸ According to the 2023 USDA Farm to School Census, Colorado SFAs participating in farm to school reported spending 3.1% of their total budgets on local food excluding fluid milk. These local food purchases generate a strong economic multiplier effect, with impact studies focused on local food incentives in Colorado indicating that every dollar spent on local food created an average of \$2.70 in economic activity.¹⁹

CULTIVATING SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

In addition to playing a role in the agricultural economy, farm to school procurement can promote the environmental sustainability of school meals, enabling SFAs to invest in sustainable growing practices and decrease cafeteria waste.

In 2015, the Farm to School Census found that nationwide, school participation in farm to school programming led to an 18% decrease in plate waste.²⁰ Educational interventions associated with farm to school, including school gardening, have also been linked to reduced food waste in schools.²¹ In Colorado, out of a total of 21 schools that reported participation in a composting program in the 2023 USDA Census, 17 also served local foods at either breakfast or lunch.²²

COLORADO FARM TO SCHOOL

LOCAL FOOD PROGRAM

The Local Food Program (LFP), administered by CDE School Nutrition, serves as an important foundation for the state's local food procurement efforts. Established as a pilot, the program not only provided state funding for local food purchasing but began building a framework for collecting data, improving implementation strategies, and strengthening capacity for statewide farm to school efforts.

Rather than relying on hypotheticals, School Nutrition now has four years of quantitative and qualitative data on school district purchases of local food. Data from the program highlights how supplemental funding can spur additional local and regional procurement, the role of technical assistance in helping to address challenges related to knowledge, interest, and capacity, and how schools source and receive local foods.

The data show that SFAs purchased local products even beyond their initial LFP award. Despite a modest annual funding amount of \$498,842, SFAs spent approximately \$2,216,723 on local products during SY 2023-24 – up significantly from \$1,360,155 in SY 2022-23.²³

Details on LFP can be found in the [2024 Legislative Report](#) published by CDE as well as on the [Local Food Guidebook](#) website, a resource created by Nourish Colorado to share farm to school resources and LFP data.

HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

Since 2022, Healthy School Meals for All (HSMA) has played a significant role in the landscape of school meals and farm to school efforts in Colorado.

HSMA provides universal free breakfast and lunch for all public school students. The program also provides grant funding for eligible school food authorities to purchase Colorado-grown, raised, or processed products. Additional grant programs support technical assistance including training in scratch cooking and local food procurement, as well as wages and stipends for school nutrition professionals.

For more information on HSMA, visit the Colorado Department of Education [HSMA landing page](#) or the [2024 legislative report](#).

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR FARM TO SCHOOL PROCUREMENT

Alongside shifts in state-level funding, the period following the onset of COVID has also brought significant changes to federal support for farm to school procurement. Among the programs enacted was the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement (LFS), administered by the USDA. LFS provided funding for the purchase of local foods (defined as those grown, raised, produced, aggregated, stored, and distributed in-state or within a 400-mile radius of production) for schools and childcare institutions.²⁴

In Colorado, \$2.6 million in first round LFS funds were awarded to CDE School Nutrition, which then sub-awarded them to school districts for local food purchases. The program prioritized strengthening Colorado food systems and supporting socially disadvantaged and small farmers, producers, ranchers, and businesses.²⁵ Over the course of two years, School Nutrition distributed funds to 33 districts across Colorado, who in turn purchased from 135 unique farmers, ranchers, food hubs and distributors.²⁶ School Nutrition was able to distribute the full LFS allocation for Colorado, demonstrating the appetite for local items in school districts and responsiveness to targeted farm to school investments.

Since 2013, Patrick Leahy Farm to School grants have represented another important funding source for farm to school efforts, providing more than \$3 million towards initiatives in Colorado. Grant recipients include school districts, nonprofits, and CDE School Nutrition.²⁷ In 2021, CDE School Nutrition received Patrick Leahy funds to sub-award to SFAs for farm to school programming, including local procurement.

COLORADO ROADMAPPING PROCESS

In 2023, the Colorado Department of Education launched a statewide Roadmapping process to better understand the needs of key stakeholders to increase access to fresh, nutritious Colorado-grown foods in schools.

From June 2024 to June 2025, CDE hosted Roadmap conversations with rural and urban school food authorities to identify barriers and opportunities in local food procurement. The process began with a series of root cause analysis sessions, designed to capture insights from school nutrition professionals about persistent procurement challenges. An online survey supplemented the in-person discussion.

Findings from the root cause analysis informed a second phase of solutions-based sessions that brought together school nutrition directors and producers to collaboratively develop and prioritize strategies for addressing identified barriers. In collaboration with School Nutrition, the Colorado State University Food Systems Team analyzed and synthesized data from both phases to identify key recommendations and next steps.

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS SESSIONS

Root cause analysis is a structured approach to uncovering the underlying causes of complex

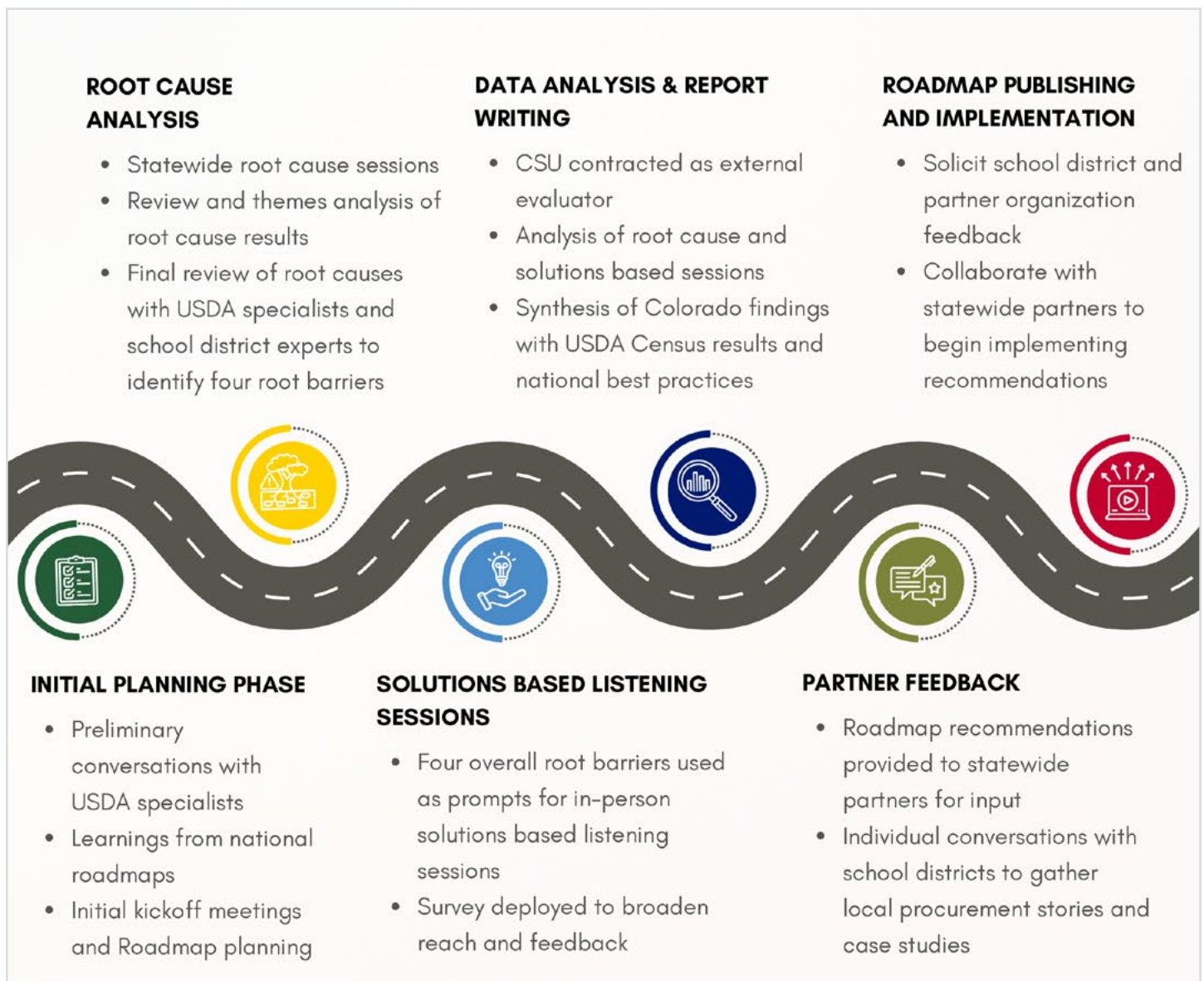
challenges.²⁸ CDE adapted this public health tool, first applied to farm to school work in Wyoming in 2018, with guidance from the USDA Farm to School Regional Lead Andrea Alma.²⁹ The resulting process prioritized identification of large, systemic barriers to local procurement, with the goal of framing future discussions around strategic, impactful solutions.

Sessions were held across Colorado, leveraging existing gatherings of school nutrition professionals to maximize participation while minimizing time burdens. Sessions took place at six Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) convenings, the 2024 Colorado School Nutrition

Association (CSNA) Annual Conference, and a Denver metro session. Data collected from the in-person sessions were supplemented with an online survey.

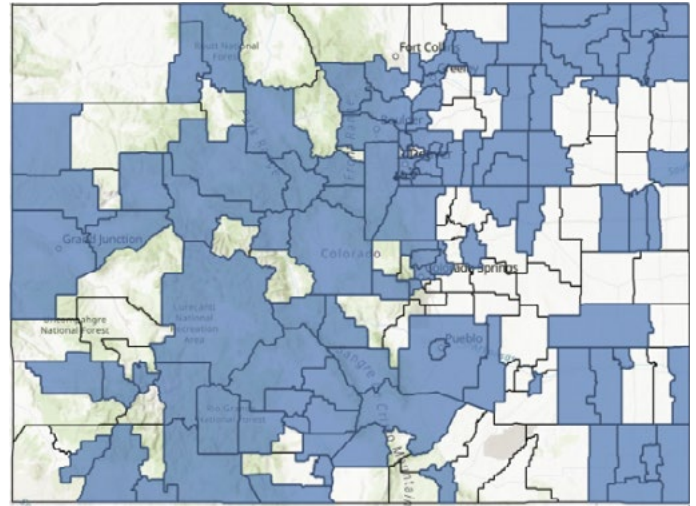
At each session, participants explored four barriers to farm to school procurement:

1. Budgets to purchase local products
2. Finding or building relationships with local producers
3. Ability to prepare meals with local products
4. Support from key stakeholders (administrators, parents, community)



Participants joined small groups based on the barrier most relevant to their experience. Facilitators guided each group through a series of “Why is this the case?” prompts to probe deeper into the root causes. Groups then synthesized their findings, identified recurring themes, and participated in an exercise to indicate the most pressing issues.

A total of 116 people participated in the root cause sessions, with an additional 36 completing the online survey, representing over 100 school districts out of 179 school districts across Colorado (see map on right).



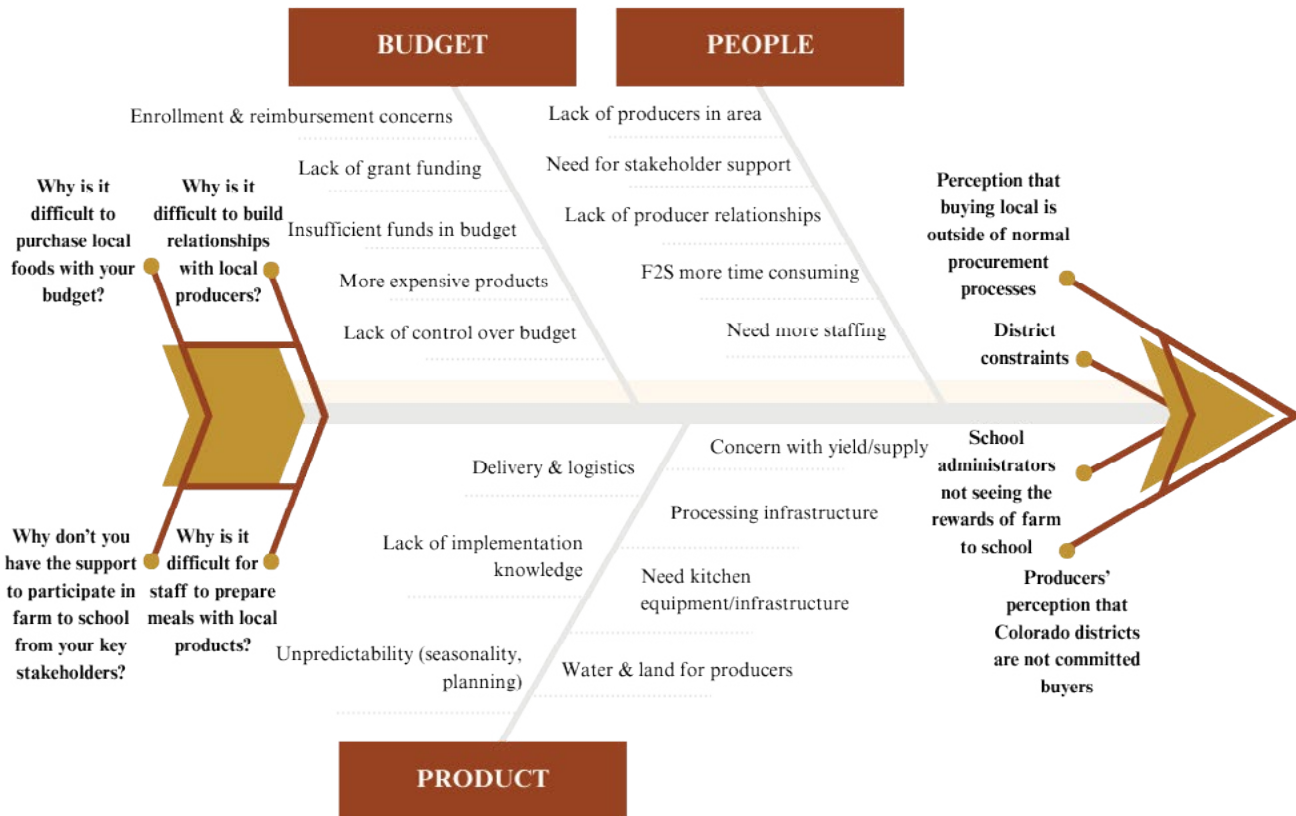
Note: The figure 179 does not include charter schools, who frequently participate in farm to school activities. Charter schools are still represented in the Roadmapping process through listening sessions.

Root Cause Analysis Diagram

Key Barriers

Causes Identified

Effect



The analysis revealed four primary root causes to identified barriers:

1. The cost of producing, processing, and delivering local food makes it too expensive.
2. Finding and communicating with farmers is difficult.
3. Preparing local food requires too much skill and time.
4. Farm to school is not valued by admin or other stakeholders because it's not understood. There is a general lack of understanding as to why they should take on farm to school.

These findings were reviewed by USDA farm to school specialists and refined through an additional food service director-focused session to dig deeper and find the underlying barriers. The final prompts from the root cause analysis which then guided the solutions phase were:

1. Colorado districts see buying local as outside of their normal procurement processes.
2. Colorado districts are often perceived not as a committed buyer and, therefore, a risky market for producers.
3. Colorado school administrators do not see clear rewards of farm to school and therefore investments in staff, equipment, and processes are lacking.
4. Colorado districts prioritize efficiency and convenience over value and quality of local due to varying district constraints.

School administrators here refers broadly to school leadership, including superintendents, principals, and school boards.

It's important to note that district administrators and school nutrition leaders operate under significant financial and operational pressures. Their responsibility to provide reliable, nutritious meals

for students, while balancing competing priorities, shapes decision making around purchasing. The root cause analysis prompts generated through this process highlight these underlying structural challenges. Administrators may also lack access to data that clearly connects farm to school initiatives to student health or academic outcomes, making it more difficult to justify these programs within tight budgets.

Despite these barriers, many Colorado administrators are actively championing farm to school efforts in their districts, including making commitments to local procurement despite budget constraints.

The solution phase prompts align with the 2023 USDA Farm to School Census. Respondents cited “staff time”, “cost”, “delivery challenges”, and “limited availability” as top barriers. The Roadmapping process builds on these findings by examining the underlying perceptions and systems that sustain these challenges.³⁰

SOLUTIONS SESSIONS

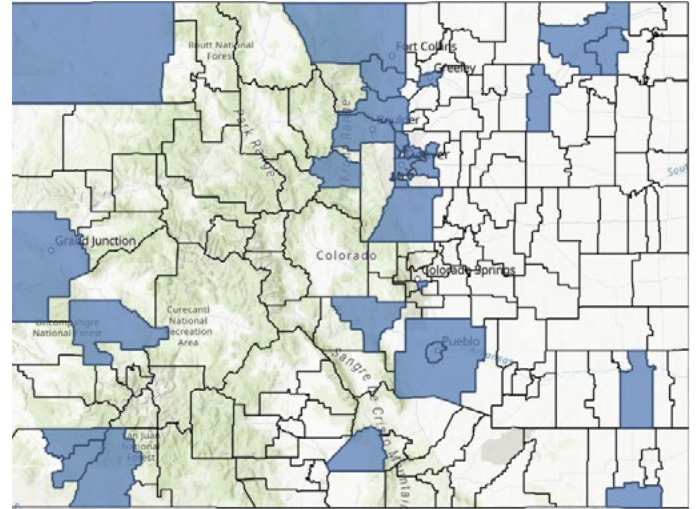
To generate actionable strategies, CDE hosted five facilitated solutions-based listening sessions: four with school districts and one with producers and aggregators. Several nonprofits and state agencies also participated.

During each session, breakout groups tackled one of the four solution prompts, brainstorming potential solutions that were compiled, shared, and prioritized through participant voting.

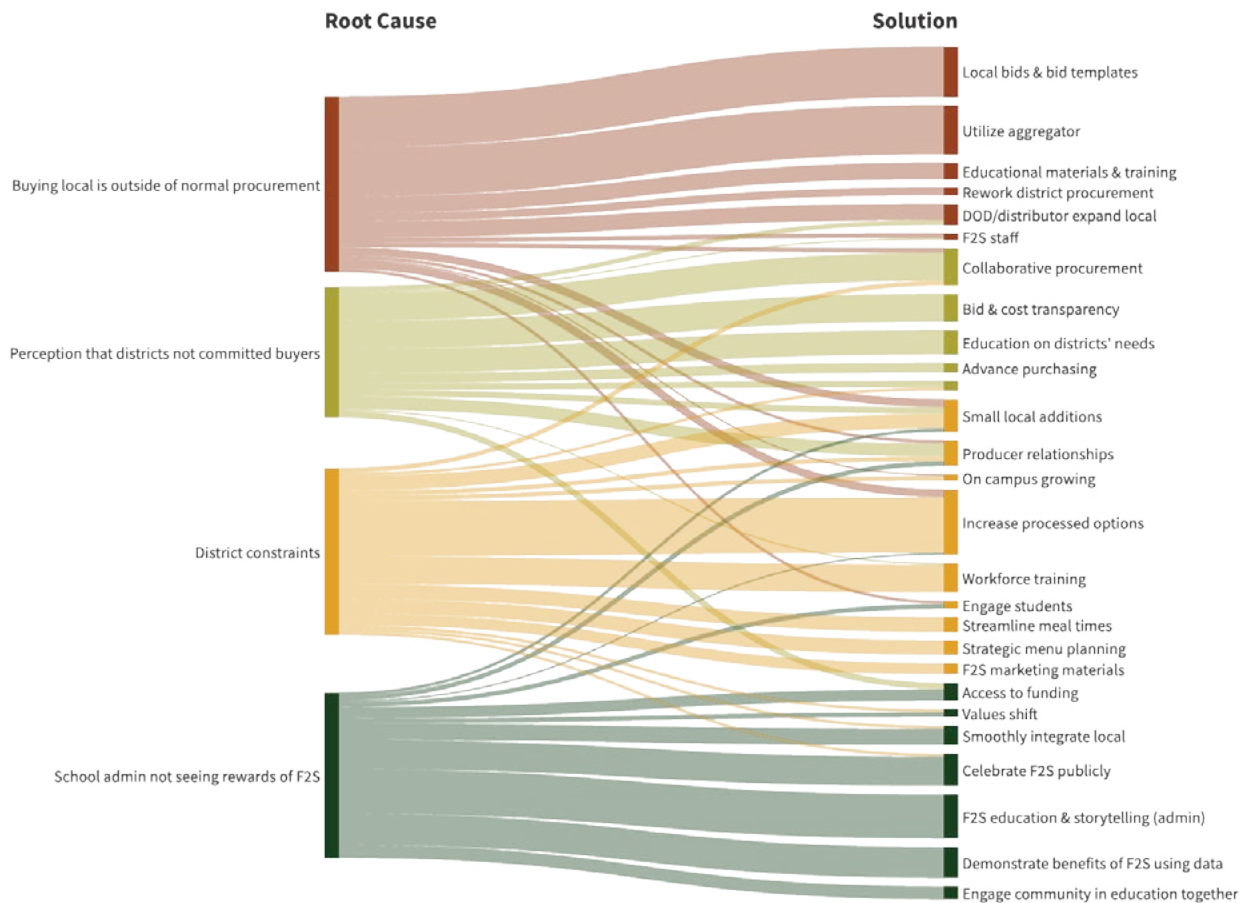
In total, 68 participants took part, representing 30 school districts, 14 producers and aggregators, and 6 state agencies and nonprofit organizations (see map on next page).

Proposed solutions were grouped into overarching themes and analyzed for frequency and priority. CDE School Nutrition Unit staff then reviewed the results to align solutions with ongoing efforts, identify

opportunities for new initiatives, and highlight potential partners. The final synthesis provides a clear, stakeholder-informed roadmap to strengthen Colorado’s farm to school procurement system and expand student access to fresh, local food.



Solutions Data Visualization: Sankey Diagram



Note: Appendix C includes solutions not displayed on Sankey Diagram (identified as a top 3 solution fewer than 3 times).

PRODUCER AND AGGREGATOR PERSPECTIVES

While the aggregated data captures the full range of solutions generated statewide, the following section highlights the March 2025 solution session focused on producers and aggregators. This session helped identify key areas of alignment and differences between the solutions proposed by suppliers and those identified by school district participants.

Barrier 1. Colorado districts see buying local as outside of their normal procurement processes.

Shared Solution: Utilize food hub, farmers market, or other aggregator.

This was the most popular solution among producers and aggregators, who tied perceptions of complexity in local purchasing to distribution challenges.

Their emphasis on the role of aggregators mirrors the broader dataset, where SFAs, nonprofits, and state agencies consistently identified aggregators and distributors as critical to integrating local procurement efficiently.

Key Lesson: Start small; incorporate local products gradually.

Producers and aggregators stressed the importance of starting somewhere by incorporating small local purchases into regular buying processes. They viewed this as a practical way to overcome initial barriers such as relationship building, local bids, and logistics that can seem daunting at the outset.

Barrier 2. Colorado districts are often perceived not as a committed buyer and, therefore, a risky market for producers.

Producers and aggregators focused their conversation on understanding the origins of this perception. One central theme was the complex planning and funding environment surrounding farm to school procurement.

Participants acknowledged the significant purchasing power of school districts but noted that unpredictable funding streams for local foods make long-term planning difficult. They also pointed out that higher prices often reflect the logistical challenges in supplying schools. Frequent staff turnover in districts compound these issues, making it harder to maintain relationships and identify consistent contacts who prioritize local purchasing.

Barrier 3. Colorado school administrators do not see clear rewards of farm to school and therefore staff, equipment, and processes are lacking.

Shared Solution: Education and storytelling.

Producers and aggregators emphasized the need for targeted education and storytelling to identify and support farm to school advocates. This solution focuses on building relationships through in-person educational events that connect procurement with educational and community outcomes, and aligns with top priorities identified by school district stakeholders.

Key Lesson: Access to targeted local procurement funding.

Participants noted that while many district stakeholders recognize the benefits of farm to school, they often lack the data needed to justify long-term commitment. Consistent funding that supports development of ongoing, compelling evaluation can demonstrate the measurable impact necessary for sustainable funding and participation.

Barrier 4. Colorado districts prioritize efficiency and convenience over value and quality of local due to varying district constraints.

Shared Solution: Increase access to processed products and related training.

Participants highlighted the importance of providing processed and value-added products that simplify local food preparation in schools. Producers and

aggregators recommended developing state-funded processing capacity that could serve both school districts and growers, enabling year-round use of local foods and easing labor constraints.

Key Lesson: Workforce training in local food prep (e.g. train the trainer).

Producers and aggregators ranked funding for workforce training and staff increases higher than other groups. They recognized that district constraints often come down to staffing, ensuring kitchen staff are trained, supported, and compensated for the additional effort required to prepare local products.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

In fall 2024, students from Trinidad, Vilas, and Las Animas school districts participated in their own Roadmapping session following a Nourish Colorado LoProCo event. Using a simple rating system one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree), students shared their perspectives on school meals and local food.

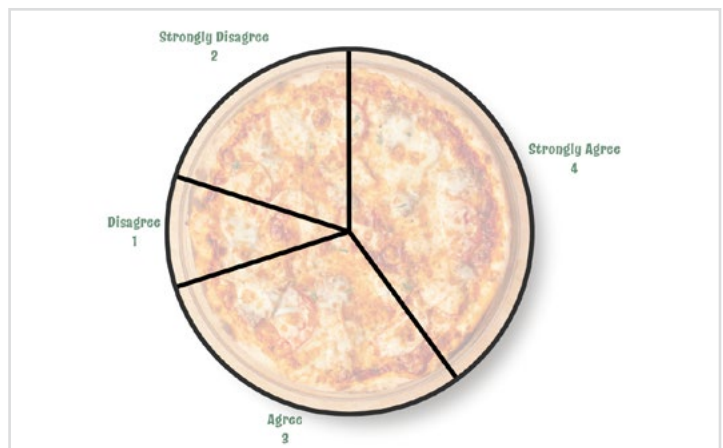
Do you enjoy school lunch?

Most students reported neutral to positive feelings about school lunch. Scratch-cooked meals, such as sandwiches and special holiday meals, were among their favorites.



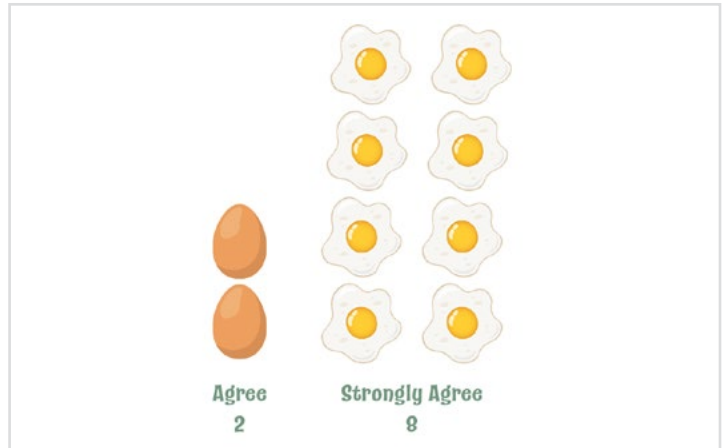
Do you know when food is local?

A majority agreed or strongly agreed that they can tell when food is local. They credited this awareness to in-person Nourish Colorado events, helping in their school kitchens, and signage featuring local farms. Students who reported being engaged in cooking and seeing menus that featured local items were the most confident in identifying local foods.



Do you think it's important to serve local foods?

All students agreed that serving local foods is important. They cited health, safety, and transparency, including fewer pesticides and additives, as primary reasons. Local eggs were a particular favorite.



Would you like to be more involved in school meals?

Students expressed interest in deeper engagement through taste tests, surveys, and sourcing local foods. They viewed this participation as an opportunity to connect with agriculture, nutrition, and culinary skills.





CDE School Nutrition

FARM TO SCHOOL ROADMAP

STATEWIDE SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Solutions generated during statewide Roadmapping sessions addressed a broad range of barriers and stages in the farm to school procurement process. Across hundreds of participants, five consistent priority areas emerged:

1. Education and training
2. Procurement processes and tools
3. Infrastructure and capacity
4. Relationships and culture
5. Funding and resources

The following recommendations reflect the solutions shared by the school district representatives, producers, aggregators, nonprofits, and state agencies who participated in listening sessions. While the sections below propose ways that School Nutrition can continue to support farm to school procurement, meaningful farm to school work is already happening across the state through direct producer-district relationships, community processing

days, student engagement in gardens and culinary programs, and more.

Many of the solutions identified through the Roadmapping process depend on cross-sector coordination. Partner specific recommendations are included in **Appendix A**.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Building knowledge, skills and capacity among school nutrition professionals, students, and school leaders.

Roadmapping participants consistently emphasized that local purchasing and scratch cooking require significant skill and experience. Expanding access to practical, hands-on training was identified as essential for scaling farm to school efforts. Education needs to span multiple stakeholder groups, helping producers, aggregators, and districts understand one another's needs; engaging communities in farm to school; and strengthening the workforce through culinary training.

Recommendation 1. Expand peer-to-peer learning opportunities grounded in Colorado experience.

Participants expressed a preference to learn directly from peers who understand Colorado’s school and agricultural contexts.

Action 1. Integrate producers, aggregators, and districts into joint farm to school trainings to strengthen cross-sector understanding and relationship building.

Action 2. Leverage statewide and regional food systems events as natural venues for farm to school matchmaking, education, and training.

Action 3. Facilitate regional conversations to explore collaborative purchasing.

Action 4. Support a consistent, virtual peer-to-peer network to sustain learning and exchange. Agendas should be informed by Roadmapping outcomes and focused on topics such as:

1. Engaging students with local procurement
2. District purchasing requirements
3. Celebrating local procurement
4. Sharing bid templates and tools
5. Strategic menu planning
6. Collecting student feedback

Recommendation 2. Pilot a Colorado Farm to School Institute, a year long professional learning opportunity for school teams to build and strengthen their local food initiatives.

Action 1. Continue participation in the Shelburne Farms and **Vermont FEED** Farm to School Institute Adaptation Program to tailor existing models for Colorado.

Action 2. Ensure institute addresses root causes identified within the Roadmap.

Action 3. Establish a diverse facilitator team, including farm to ECE experts, producers, and non-profit partners to guide the development of a Colorado Farm to School Institute.³¹

Action 4. Secure funding to pilot a virtual Colorado Farm to School Institute which would broaden participation, lower barriers to access, and build statewide engagement.

A future Institute should intentionally include administrators, teachers, and evaluators to link procurement with curriculum, nutrition education, and broader community goals.

Recommendation 3. Support student engagement in school meal programs.

Action 1. Support districts engaged in activities that promote student participation in procurement and meal programs. Examples include:

1. Culinary skill development alongside school nutrition professionals
2. Gathering menu feedback and assisting with menu planning
3. Growing and raising food on campus

These activities reinforce local procurement efforts while building career skills and food and agricultural literacy among students.

Action 2. Promote additional opportunities for federal and state funding for student engagement when appropriated.

PROCUREMENT PROCESSES & TOOLS

Streamlining systems and strategies for local purchasing.

Participants identified a need to simplify and standardize local purchasing. Solutions ranged from small pilot purchases to regional cooperative buying. Strengthening relationships with aggregators and distributors, key connectors in the supply chain, emerged as one of the most widely supported strategies.

Districts emphasized the importance of ready-to-use templates and digital tools that save time and reduce administrative burden.

Recommendation 1. Maintain and expand Source Local Food page on CDE School Nutrition website to ensure access to School Nutrition tools and services.

Action 1. Continue to update and maintain local food resources, trainings, and templates, to help districts identify and access existing support.

Recommendation 2: Integrate risk management into CDE connection events.

Action 1. Provide technical assistance to address concerns about supply, seasonality, and contract performance. Topics may include:

- Flexible contract clauses and crop substitutions
- Weather or pest contingency language
- Regular producer reporting and communication practices
- Menu sharing and demand forecasting
- Forecasting cost and providing cost estimates

Recommendation 3. Streamline farm to school data collection.

Action 1. Continue direct outreach to achieve full participation in the USDA Farm to School Census.

Action 2. Request an optional accounting code under existing food service expenditure categories for better local food purchasing and data collection.

Action 3. Explore software platforms to track and visualize procurement data, enabling better communication of farm to school impacts and supporting future evaluation.³²

Action 4. Identify state and federal funding streams to offset software costs.

Recommendation 4. Provide education that supports partnerships that strengthen procurement to drive up the scale of local purchases.

Action 1. Provide procurement education to districts that allows them to build efficient, reliable pathways for integrating Colorado-grown foods into school meals.

INFRASTRUCTURE & CAPACITY

Building physical and operational capacity for local food procurement.

Both producers and districts identified infrastructure as a top barrier. Gaps exist throughout the supply chain, from on-farm equipment and processing capacity to school kitchens and cold storage. Staffing capacity was also cited as a critical need, particularly for scratch cooking and local coordination.

Participants also noted the role of on-campus gardens. These gardens provide relatively small volumes of food, but offer valuable opportunities for teachers, administrators, and students to engage with food production.

Infrastructure also shapes perceptions of supply. Findings from the USDA Farm to School Census in Colorado show that while many districts are willing to purchase locally, concerns about supply persist.³³ These concerns are linked in part to limited processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure that producers and distributors rely on to guarantee consistent supply.

Recommendation 1. Enhance farm to school program infrastructure by supporting efforts to secure dedicated coordination capacity at the district or regional level.

Action 1. Support efforts to secure funding and grants for district or regional farm to school coordinators internally or externally to the district.

Action 2. Create space for districts to share coordination models and integration strategies during trainings and peer-to-peer learning events.

Recommendation 2: Leverage state and federal funds for kitchen equipment, processing, and storage infrastructure.

Action 1. Promote access to USDA equipment grants to expand school kitchen capacity.

Action 2. Support peer to peer learning around collaborative use of school kitchen equipment to increase the impact of funds.

RELATIONSHIPS & CULTURE

Strengthening trust, communication, and shared values.

Sustaining local procurement requires building a culture that values farm to school participation. Producers expressed a need for clearer, more consistent communication with districts, while schools highlighted the importance of community engagement to build trust and support.

Recommendation 1. Celebrate and communicate farm to school success.

Action 1: Prioritize community-based events, such as taste tests and meet-the-farmer days, that engage students, parents, and school staff.

Action 2. Continue to increase engagement with national and statewide events that encourage farm to school procurement, such as Colorado Farm to School Month, the Mountain Plains Crunch Off, and Turnip the Beet.

Recommendation 2. Facilitate producer-district relationship building.

Action 1. Host matchmaking and professional development opportunities that bring producers and school nutrition professionals together to educate on how to be trusted buyers and sellers.

Action 2. Leverage existing statewide events and School Nutrition trainings as opportunities for relationship building.

FUNDING & RESOURCES

Ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

Adequate and consistent funding underpins every other priority - education, procurement, infrastructure, and relationships. Participants emphasized that funding strategies must be aligned across state agencies and paired with education and relationship building that clearly communicates farm to school benefits.

Recommendation 1. Align statewide funding priorities.

Action 1. Coordinate with state agencies including Colorado Department of Agriculture, Office of Economic Development and International Trade, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Department of Human Services, and the Department of Labor and Employment to align goals and identify joint opportunities.

Recommendation 2. Continue to pursue federal and state funding for Colorado-grown food and infrastructure.

Action 1. Apply for and administer federal and state grants that support procurement of local foods, technical training, farm to school education, relationship building, continued development of resources and training, and investments in kitchen storage and processing capacity.

ROADMAPPING PROCESS FUNDING PRIORITIES

CATEGORY	PRIORITY FOCUS
Education and Training	Farm to school education for communities; student engagement in nutrition and agriculture; workforce development for scratch cooking and menu planning
Procurement Processes and Tools	Collaboration with aggregators and distributors; small-scale local purchasing pilots; producer directories; development of templates and tools
Infrastructure and Capacity	Kitchen and cold storage improvements; on-farm equipment; value-added processing; staff wages and coordinator positions
Relationships and Culture	Celebratory events; student feedback channels; transparent communication and collaboration across stakeholders





APPENDIX & CITATIONS

Appendix

CDE Farm to School Roadmap Appendix

Citations

Recommended Roadmap Citation:

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- 30 *Farm to School Census Results*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results>
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