

Midwest Farm to School and Early Care

COVID Response Networking Group



**Best Practices Report
Developed Spring 2023**

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Project Overview

Purpose

In the early Spring of 2022, staff with ISU Extension and Outreach Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program who work on farm to school and early care initiatives developed a proposal to convene a cohort of partners supporting farm to school and early care initiatives in adjacent midwestern states for the purpose of supporting regional farm to school and early care stakeholders. Participating states included representatives from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, South Dakota, and Nebraska. Partner groups from each participating state were compensated for their time and participation at a rate of \$4,000 per state group. The goal of the project was to explore the following questions via quarterly networking and sharing:

- How is an enhanced need for local food in educational institutions showing-up in the Midwest? How is this connected to the impacts and experience of COVID-19?
- How are Midwestern states responding to COVID-19 impacts through local food procurement programs, policy, partnerships, and statewide organizing efforts?
- Are there opportunities for supply chain connections for local products across state borders to support local food procurement in adjacent communities?
- What are the outcomes of hosting multi-state, farm to school and early care networking opportunities, building relationships, and learning from geographically-close partners?

Overview

From March 2022 - May 2023, six, two-hour meetings were hosted by Krista Smith and Chelsea Krist, staff with ISU Extension and Outreach Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program who work on farm to school and early care initiatives. The outline of meeting themes is below. Having convened in-depth and recurring discussion over several meetings, the group developed this best practice report to share as a resource with other state networks, coalitions, and other groups working collaboratively to support farm to school and early care initiatives on a state level.

Outline of Meeting Themes

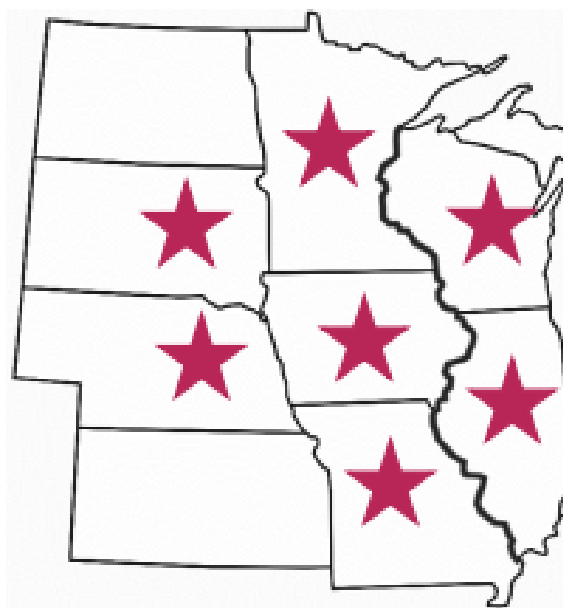
1. March 2022: Project Overview and Partner Introductions
2. May 2022: Local Food Supply Chains
3. August 2022: Partnerships for Policy Change
4. November 2022: Racial and Social Equity
5. March 2023: Group Collaboratively Identifies Best Practices
6. May 2023: Group Collaboratively Finalizes Best Practices Report

Partner Acknowledgement

Our ISU Extension and Outreach Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Program wants to offer a huge thank you to the partners from states surrounding Iowa who engaged with their state and our collective of regional Midwestern partners to make this networking group happen.

Participating states included representatives from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, South Dakota, and Nebraska. The make-up of state teams represented in this group varied in size, from one organization representing a state network to seven organizations representing a state network.

The following individuals and organizations are recognized for their support and contribution to this project. Contact information is shared and can be used by readers to follow-up with specific representatives to ask questions and learn further about the projects and programs detailed in this report.



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Local Food Supply Chains

Introduction

A local food supply chain includes all of the processes involved in the movement of local foods from a farm to a consumer and includes marketing, markets, distribution, aggregation, processing, packaging, purchasing, preparation, resource recovery, and waste disposal ([NC State Extension](#)). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, local food supply chains were essential for moving food from farms to communities to get people fed and farmers paid. In many cases, local food supply chains filled gaps and met food access needs more effectively than national or global food distribution methods as local supply chains were less disrupted by the pandemic.

Process

In May 2022, partners working across the Midwest in support of Farm to School and Early Care met to discuss several topics related to local food supply chain work happening within their states (see table 1). This information was assessed and evolved into a series of best practices and recommendations related to navigating and supporting local food supply chains, especially in response to COVID-19.

Local Food Supply Chain Topics	Description and Context
Local Procurement Partnership Support	Essential partner organizations and roles, including AmeriCorps, FoodCorps, Local Procurement Coaches/Leaders, etc.
USDA Programs	Using federal grant opportunities in support of local food supply chains; examples include LFS, LFPA, Farm to DoD.
State Network Facilitation	State-specific strategies to strengthen local food supply chains; examples include Marketplace Meet-Ups, K-12 + ECE procurement hubs, farmers markets as food hubs, and local food incentive programs.
Local Food Reimbursement Programs	Grants and policy initiatives encouraging schools and ECEs to shift budget priorities and funds toward local purchasing.
Local Food Logistics	How to navigate the regionally-specific local food supply chains; examples include seasonality, season extension, purchasing suggestions, processing gaps, and potential regional partnerships.
Table 1: Topics of Discussion and Context for Local Food Supply Chain Conversation	

Best Practices: Local Food Supply Chains

1. Grow Capacity for Local Procurement Leaders

Local leaders in community-based food system work understand community needs, and cultural contexts that make the procurement of local food more culturally and financially sustainable. These decentralized, community-based groups can act and make decisions with flexibility and adaptability, especially during supply chain disruptions like COVID 19 presented. As state groups fund projects and programs in support of local food supply chains, building up the leadership network and compensating new and emerging leaders in this work can have statewide impact.

IOWA

In the summer of 2021, the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community Food Systems Team trained and certified nine people as local food procurement coaches for schools and childcare centers. Funding for the training program was provided by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to the Iowa Farmers Union, and Iowa State's food system's team is a partner in the grant project.

The coaches are local food experts in their communities. They have knowledge of the local food system and are connected to farms, farmers markets and food hubs.

The coaches completed approximately eight hours of online education, successfully demonstrating competency in federal and state procurement regulations, school nutrition programs, sourcing local food in Iowa, completing common menu calculations and assisting a school wellness team with a local food procurement plan. [Learn more here.](#)

NEBRASKA

In 2022, Nebraska launched the Local and Indigenous Foods Training, or [LIFT](#), program with USDA Team Nutrition grant funding to increase the capacity of local procurement in schools, and student engagement in farm to school. Participating schools received training in use of standardized school recipes, the role of seasonality when sourcing local foods for school meals, and Nebraska-focused recipes featuring at least one of seven different featured Nebraska Harvest of the Month items to actively involve students in evaluating and marketing the recipe. Traditional, indigenous foods like aronia berries and bison were added to Harvest of the Month offerings, to increase connections to traditional foods for Native students. An expansion project is currently underway to fully develop Nebraska Harvest of the Month Indigenous Foods, incorporating traditional foodway topics and values throughout the parent materials and featuring the three sisters, corn, squash, and beans. Schools serving tribal students will have an opportunity to work with coaches in offering the

LIFT program in future school years and will receive technical assistance in procuring HOM Indigenous foods from vendors including within tribes and/or directly from school gardens and growing. Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) and Nebraska Extension partnered on this effort, working directly with schools across the state. Extension professionals identified gaps between the amount of time needed to prepare for sourcing LIFT items, and a lack of infrastructure for sourcing locally. The project team offered open office hours to brainstorm solutions to sourcing challenges and to learn about where schools had found success.

In 2021, NDE, partnering with Nebraska Extension, was awarded a USDA Farm to School grant to design and offer Nebraska's first Farm to School Institute. Modeled off VT FEEDs long-running, evidence-based Northeast Farm to School Institute, Nebraska partners welcomed eight school teams to the inaugural Institute where they spent a week learning about best practices from around the country and action planning as a team. Each team consisted of at least one administrator, a school food service member, a teacher, and an Extension professional. Coaches were paired with school teams to help lead them through a strategic planning process to develop action plans which were carried out during the '21-22 school year. Nebraska will now offer three concurrent Institutes in 2024-2026 in partnership with state agencies in Missouri and Kansas, utilizing USDA Formula Grant funds.

Finally, in 2022-2023, NDE, Extension, No More Empty Pots, Center for Rural Affairs, and Buy Fresh Buy Local Nebraska partnered for a series of Bringing the Farm to School producer training. This training, developed by National Center for Appropriate Technology and National Farm to School Network, in cooperation with the USDA, centers seasonality, school purchasing cycles and production calendars, and equips producers with skills and resources to start or expand their sales to schools.

MINNESOTA

In 2022, Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), and University of Minnesota Extension launched [Minnesota Harvest of the Month](#), a Farm to School program designed to promote and support local foods in schools and build connections between the 3 C's of Farm to School: cafeteria, classroom, and community. The program offers free marketing materials such as posters and stickers to highlight local foods in school meals, as well as a recipe hub to support staff with menu planning. Accompanying academic standards-based educational resources extend the program into K-12 classrooms. Minnesota Harvest of the Month was developed with support from a USDA Farm to School grant. Prior to its statewide-launch, the program was piloted at 14 schools in Minnesota.

Each month, the Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team offers [Monthly Virtual Farm to School and Early Care Technical Assistance \(TA\) Office Hour](#) - an event wherein Minnesota

stakeholders can connect with members of the Minnesota Farm to School Leadership Team, Minnesota Farm to Early Care Network Advisory Group, peers, and other farm to school and early care stakeholders each month to discuss and find answers to questions related to local foods and making farm to school and early care a success in their community. Open to anyone with questions related to farm to school and farm to early care, this event is a great opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and sharing. All are welcome – farmers, school nutrition professionals, early care providers, parents, teachers, distributors, gardeners, local public health professionals, extension educators, and any other farm to school and early care advocates.

Starting in 2020, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) joined with the University of Minnesota (UMN) on the [*Statewide Cooperative Partnership for Local and Regional Markets*](#) (the Partnership) with funding from the [USDA Federal State Marketing Improvement Program](#). The Partnership is a group of [40+ organizations](#) that provide input on the diverse experiences of small- and mid-sized producers, retailers, and consumers across the state.

2. Prioritize and Prepare for Engagement with USDA Program Opportunities

The USDA is a prominent funder of local food supply chain work, releasing annual and new funding opportunities as budgets allow. Preparing to engage with and apply for these opportunities requires capacity and partnership with eligible entities, such as state agencies, local school districts, and other community food system stakeholders. As timelines for submitting applications and making programmatic decisions are often short, it is beneficial to state networks to prioritize and facilitate these essential partnerships in an ongoing and in-depth manner so as to best communicate program impacts and other components of evaluation.

In 2022, two new programs were released that set goals specific to funding local food in K-12 school programs and ECEs: The Local Food for Schools ([LFS](#)) and The Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program ([LFPA](#)). The following descriptions details how state partners relied on partnerships to facilitate their participation in the LFS and LFPA opportunities.

NEBRASKA

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) accepted LFPA funds and subawarded to the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF) to lead statewide collaboration for full utilization of funds, especially by establishing the first-ever Nebraska Healthy Local Foods Committee (NHLFC) to serve as advisors on use of funds and local food system infrastructure limitations and opportunities. NHLFC will partner with agriculture organizations, food distributors, and cooperatives to identify socially disadvantaged producers and recruit those producers to participate in the LFPAP.

To guide the work of the NHLFC, based on lessons learned from the past four years, and to amplify the reach of future learnings, Communities of Practice (CoP) will be formed around three LFPAP-related domains – production, marketing, and emergency food distribution. CoP are a structured way to create peer-learning opportunities that facilitate the sharing of lessons learned, shorten the time it takes to reach proficiency, and create space to collaborate with others.

The Nebraska Department of Education has entered into the Local Food for Schools cooperative agreement with the USDA and will subaward to schools who opt-in to the funding in the easternmost 37 counties of the state (aligning with four Economic Development Districts) with two allocation cycles over an 18 month period. NDE will gather data including purchasing information from all districts who opted-in to subawards and

draft a report to share with decision-makers and others, demonstrating the impact of the LFS program. This program will serve as a “pilot” in Nebraska, informing on impacts of local food incentive dollars, limitations of access to local foods, opportunities for growth and leveraging of funding programs, and needs. To summarize, the NDE will (1) allocate funds to schools for the purchase of unprocessed or minimally processed foods from local, small business producers, (2) provide technical assistance to schools and producers, including resources, training, and networking events, (3) leverage recent developments including the Nebraska Farm to School Program Act, Local Food Purchase Assistance Program, and 2022 USDA Farm to School Grant initiatives to target socially disadvantaged producers. This project will pave a way toward a thriving, resilient farm to school infrastructure.

In conjunction with the funding, participating schools will also receive support via resources and events that assist with making the school and producer connection and grow in understanding about successfully purchasing from local small business and socially disadvantaged producers. Schools will receive training in preparation for accessing the local foods database, MarketMaker, hosted by Nebraska Extension. MarketMaker will also be housed as a plug-in on the NDE farm to school website.

Nebraska will especially consider opportunities for networking, following the [Nebraska Market Meetup](#) model offered virtually in November 2021 in response to COVID supply chain issues; and offered in-person in three eastern Nebraska regions in winter/spring 2023 in preparation to support relationship building and potential sales channels between producers and school buyers.

SOUTH DAKOTA

USDA Partnerships for Success in LFPA, Farm to School Grants & Food Access

1. [The South Dakota Department of Agriculture](#) was awarded an LFPA grant with [Feeding South Dakota](#). These partnerships are helping to build connections between producers and communities, and helping producers think of alternative markets for their products in the future, including schools and early care centers.

2. In October of 2021, SDSU Extension, Dakota Rural Action, and USDA partnered on a webinar titled “USDA Farm to School Grant Program” for farm to school stakeholders in South Dakota. The webinar included information about how to apply, benefits of the grant, experiences from previous South Dakota awardees, and Q&A with a USDA representative. For the USDA Farm to School Grant Program cycle directly following the webinar, four South Dakota projects were awarded. This was the 7th most awards of any state nationally, and the most awards per capita for any state. These grants, and the increased knowledge from stakeholders on how to successfully apply, resulted in \$307,994 in South Dakota farm to school projects over two years to improve school nutrition and local agriculture markets.

3. IronFox Farm, an non-profit urban farm in Sioux Falls that does farm to school education with elementary students is an applicant for an USDA Urban Ag Implementation Project grant that would expand its work to three additional schools in low income, low access neighborhoods in the city.

MINNESOTA

1st in the Nation USDA AMS Partnership + Staff to Support Federal Fundraising

Minnesota had a huge win for Farm to School, becoming the first state in the nation to sign an agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) as part of its Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program in 2022. The agreement is providing \$3.4 million dollars for Minnesota school districts to purchase local, nutritious foods to serve in school meals through spring of 2024. Minnesota was able to leverage the existing Farm to School grant program to craft a competitive application to secure this USDA [Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement](#). The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) already had a grant structure in place for distributing funds to reimburse schools for purchasing from Minnesota farmers and producers.

Minnesota stakeholders also successfully advocated for the creation of a new Climate Coordinator position at MDA during the 2022 state legislative session, partially with the rationale that this position will be able to support accessing federal funding for state climate initiatives (the new position will start in 2025).

ILLINOIS

In 2020 Illinois hosted the inaugural Farm to School Institute, an online event with partner Angelic Organics in Caledonia, IL. This project was funded through the USDA-FNS Farm to School Grant yr 2019/20. The Institute, originally created as a 3-day in-person event on Angelic Organics learning farm in Caledonia IL, transformed into an online summer-long educational event with video engagement from the learning farm and “barns” or blocks of farm to school education topics including supporting materials, training videos, live interaction between participants, and additional resources. Fourteen teams, fifty-two individuals total, from K-12 schools, early childcare centers and Juvenile Justice Centers participated throughout the summer and fall months.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak and an uptick of activity in Illinois local food sheds Seven Generations Ahead and the Illinois Farm to School Network (a program of Seven Generations Ahead) created the Illinois Farm to School Coalition. The coalition began with inaugural members Seven Generations Ahead/ Illinois Farm to School Network, the Illinois Stewardship Alliance and the Illinois Farm Bureau’s Local Food division. Over the first year the coalition grew to thirteen organizations and state agency members.

With notice of the upcoming USDA Local Food in Schools (LFS) grant program and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA) were invited to join the coalition. Both agencies added representatives to the coalition ranks.

Member organizations of the Illinois Farm to School Coalition including Illinois Stewardship Alliance, The Common Market, the Illinois Farm Bureau, and the Illinois Farm to School Network worked alongside the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to research LFS programs across the country and provide best practices and resources to assist in creating a balanced and well designed LFS grant program. The Illinois Farm to School Network continues to assist ISBE in connecting farmers to K-12 districts across the state and provide local procurement co-trainings for institutions utilizing the LFS funds. The Illinois Stewardship Alliance developed policy support for the Healthy School Meals for All bill (HB 2471) which includes a full time Farm to School Coordinator position at ISBE. This legislation was passed in May of 2023 and on June 14 was sent to Governor Pritzker for his signature. The legislation and position is currently not funded and the coalition is working to secure an appropriation for FY 2025 and beyond.

In 2022 the Illinois Farm Bureau provided funding for Seven Generations Ahead and the Illinois Farm to School Network to create a farm to school farmer training series with combined listening sessions to discover barriers when selling to K-12 schools and institutions. These sessions began in 2022 and continued through the spring of 2023. The National Center for Appropriate Technology became an integral member in this project providing trainers who shared the [“Bringing the Farm to School”](#) training program created in partnership with the National Farm to School Network and U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service. The information accumulated during this training and listening session series, four in total from Oct 2022 through April 2023, will be released in the report “Barriers and Solutions to Advancing Farm to School Across Illinois” in summer of 2023.

In 2023 the Illinois Public Health Institute and partners were awarded 16 ml for [the USDA School Food System Transformation Challenge Sub-Grants initiative](#). The Innovation Hub sub-grants will focus on schools, farmers/food producers, and other collaborators in underserved communities, to make sure that kids are getting nutritious and tasty food while also strengthening the local farm economy in the region. Seven Generations Ahead is the state agent for Illinois and will be advancing this grant opportunity to invite farmers, other stakeholders in the local food value chain, and K-12 districts across the state to participate in this opportunity starting in early 2024.

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has a cooperative agreement with the USDA to create the Wisconsin Local Food Purchase Assistance (WI LFPA) Program. The program aims to strengthen local food systems, support Wisconsin farmers, and distribute fresh nutritious foods to underserved communities. DATCP is working collaboratively with producers, distributors, food security organizations, and tribal partners to provide program development, coordinate transportation and logistics, and procure food from local producers through partnership with [Marbleseed, Wisconsin Farmers Union](#), and [Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative](#) (also a WI LFS grantee).

In Wisconsin, the Department of Public Instruction- School Nutrition Team applied for and was awarded LFS funding. The Wisconsin LFS Program is leveraging similar partnerships as DATCP's LFPA, but with a focus on the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program. We also coordinated efforts with DATCP to align our grant goals and objectives and identify stakeholders like the WI Beef Council who can assist with marketing and educational resources. Subawards for the program were made in mid-January 2023 to 11 WI Non-SFAs subawards (farmers/producers, aggregators, co-op, distributors, non-profit organizations) to total \$2,437,000.00. In addition, 118 SFA subawards were made totalling \$1,010,772.

The program is expanding, but has thus far benefited 25 small businesses and or socially disadvantaged farmers/producers. SFAs benefiting from this program are estimated to be in excess of 250 SFAs (Non-SFA transactions + SFA transactions).

3. Facilitate State Network Connections

Statewide Coalitions are in a strong position to facilitate, based on local and regional need, creative opportunities to bring together cross-sector partners. Diversity in perspective is a strength when convening discussions and training related to local food systems. Bringing together representation from different regions and cultural communities enhances shared learning and the potential for innovations and enhancements in local food procurement processes.

WISCONSIN

Monthly Marketplace Meetings provide a networking opportunity for school food buyers and menu planners to connect with farmers and producers to build relationships, make procurement connections, and expand farm to school markets. Discussion is led by participants sharing their own products, services, and menu needs. Meetings are hosted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

IOWA

[The Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition](#) holds an annual conference in June. At the onset of Covid and deep into in-person conference planning, a pivot was required. Rather than completely canceling the conference, the planning team quickly put together two virtual gatherings held via Zoom: One in June on the original conference date, which included mini-presentations from original session presenters, and another gathering in September to garner excitement around October's Farm to School Month and Iowa Local Food Day. There were 270 registrants from 6 states for the June session and 119 for the October session.

Through funding from ASPHN (Association for State Public Health Nutritionists), Iowa contracted with Cocoa Creative Agency, a black-owned, local business to facilitate virtual conferences in 2021 and 2022. Pivoting during the pandemic to a virtual platform allowed us to continue to share learning and provided opportunities for folx statewide that may have been unable to travel to join. Three years planning a virtual conference allowed the planning team to refine delivery and provide a dynamic opportunity for the statewide Farm to School and Early Care Community in the following ways:

- Contracting with Cocoa Creative Agency to manage technical components of the virtual stage freed up staff to focus on content and delivery throughout the conference - for both the main session and breakout sessions. Early childhood professionals, teachers, and nutritionists were able to earn CEUs for sessions attended.

- Networking occurred throughout the conference via a conference chat and individual session chat
- Sessions were recorded and archived on the [Iowa Farm to School and Early Care website](#) for future viewing and gave attendees the opportunity to view sessions they did not attend live
- One webpage was the home of the conference both live and archived, which simplified live navigation and follow-up
- A tech-help button allowed attendees to seek real-time assistance throughout the conference
- Attendance was recorded and attendees were able to earn continuing education credits

The 2023 Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Conference was back in person as a three day event in collaboration with the Community Food Systems Conference. It was great to be in person again, where networking is organic and learning is deeper. However, the virtual conference allowed the network to stay in touch and continue the work throughout the Covid pandemic.

NEBRASKA

Nebraska farm to school partners are building a strong statewide network through several overlapping efforts:

1. The Local Food for Schools funding is currently being offered to schools in the eastern third of the state, and partners are exploring how we can expand across Nebraska. Efforts are underway to grow long-term capacity of school leaders in Nebraska by identifying barriers and developing new relationships through this funding stream.
2. The NDE was awarded a FY22 USDA Farm to School Grant to collaborate with partners in developing a statewide network. Starting in July 2023, the project development and advisory team will spend the next two years hosting listening sessions with stakeholders, developing a root cause analysis and report, engaging in facilitated strategic planning, and planning the Network structure, priorities, and purpose and finally introducing the Network at a 2024 Farm to School Summit.
3. Recently awarded funds in Nebraska from the Local Food Purchasing Assistance program and the Regional Foods Business Center grant will allow farm to school and other partners to build a food system advisory committee to guide outreach and network development in our state.
4. Several conferences in Nebraska provide opportunities for continued network development. The annual Local Food + Healthy Farms conference hosts farm to school sessions, highlighting best practices and innovative ideas, combined with networking opportunities. Several professional development opportunities for food

service personnel are offered each summer (Nebraska School Nutrition Association conference, Administrator Days, Career and Technical Education CTE) with farm to school trainings.

5. At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Nebraska partners launched a series of virtual meetups that brought local farmers together with school food authorities, distributors and others to collectively share challenges and solutions to supply chain disruptions experienced that year.
6. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency continues to host a Food Security Taskforce, initiated during COVID. More than 150 attendees from agencies, non-profits, food distribution entities, and others are invited to these bi-weekly meetings to provide program updates. Participants have included those involved in programs like Double-Up Food Bucks, farmers' market associations, and state agencies who manage USDA programs including SNAP and Child Nutrition Programs.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Strategic Planning for Statewide Impact + Producer Trainings

1. Statewide strategic planning through a grant awarded to the Dept. of Ed. External consultants were hired to evaluate current Farm to school happenings and develop a strategic plan for how to expand and improve farm to school in South Dakota. Regional gatherings were hosted in various cities in the state. In total, 64 community members attended the gatherings and the registration list for the Farm to School newsletter increased to 154 people! With this, South Dakota now hosts bi-monthly Statewide Farm to School Network Meetings.

2. The South Dakota Department of Education was awarded a USDA Farm to School Grant in 2022 in partnership with SDSU Extension. One of the funded project activities was to host "Bringing the Farm to School: Agricultural Producer Training." Two trainings occurred in Winter of 2023. A total of 43 participants attended and received a \$250 stipend. Feedback showed the stipend was "somewhat influential" to attendance. The grant- funds also enhanced the training with paid speakers with school nutrition and agriculture experience. Each training had an optional farm to school social that was open to the public and was hosted at a reserved room or table in a public restaurant.

4. Center Seasonality and Advanced Planning in Supply Chain Work

Organizations, agencies and coalitions working statewide are often in technical assistance positions, supporting schools and early care sites to set realistic, scalable local food purchasing goals that meet their site-specific needs and capacity. As these food system practitioners strive to meet customer demand, they must be in solid communication and trusting relationship with the producers and distributors of local food. Planning for products to be available, addressing gaps in the supply chain, adapting to seasonal challenges with the weather and crop quality- major questions and challenges such as these require advance planning and consideration to navigate.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Procurement through Food Hubs, Farmers Markets, and Meat Processing

1. South Dakota has one for-profit food hub located in the Sioux Falls region, [Dakota Fresh Food Hub](#) that does direct to consumer purchases. Dakota Fresh started partnering with one rural school district to supply local products in Fall of 2022. They hope to expand to more schools.
2. [Wall Meats](#) is a slaughter and processing facility with experience in Beef to School. They contract with over a dozen different schools to supply beef from Black Hills area ranchers.
3. [The Black Hills Farmers Market](#) operates an online Wholesale Market which combines products from local agricultural producers. Schools are able to take advantage of the increased quantities achieved by product aggregation to purchase local products. In 2022, at least two schools purchased from the wholesale market.

MINNESOTA

A non-profit in MN, Renewing the Countryside, got a USDA LFPP grant to work on Farmers Market Aggregation hubs in 9 locations; online order form; customers (individual or institutions) can build boxes online

- <https://www.farmersmarkethub.org/>
- Fortify and multiply: functional and efficient connections between small producers, institutions, food insecure communities (SNAP can be used on the website)
- Open Food Network - platform being used for this: <https://openfoodnetwork.net/>; <https://openfoodnetwork.net/aitkin-farmers-market-food-hub/shop>

NEBRASKA

No More Empty Pots (NMEP) is an Omaha-based grassroots nonprofit organization that connects individuals and groups to improve self-sufficiency, regional food security and economic resilience of urban and rural communities through advocacy and action. NMEP serves as a food hub for southeast Nebraska. When COVID hit, needs shifted and No More Empty Pots, as aggregator and hub, needed to shift.

- Increase in CSAs - buying farmers out of available supply
- Without emergency funding, challenged to transition to sustaining subscription programs. Working to partner with farmers who struggle with distribution
- Trends in supply and demand are navigated and communication is facilitated by food hubs (continuing to increase now; CSA purchasing became more of a new norm)

The NDE hosts a [Child Nutrition Training Academy](#) to benefit professional development and leverage the National School Nutrition Association Year 1 & 2 Certification Training Mission which is to provide training for school nutrition professionals to build accountable, healthy school nutrition environments that promote students' nutritional well-being and academic achievement. For 54 years, the Nebraska Department of Education and the University of Nebraska Lincoln have had a history of delivering quality educational experiences for school food service managers and nutrition staff members. This tradition continues to address professional standards and education requirements through the Child Nutrition Training Academy. Farm to school was incorporated into the 2023 Year 2 training, offering a full day workshop to teach about Nebraska partners who can support efforts, seasonality, local food procurement, and culinary skills, demos, and recipe preparation of Nebraska Harvest of the Month items.

As mentioned in a previous section, the NDE and partners have hosted Bringing the Farm to School producer trainings, one to tribal producers and in partnership with the Winnebago Food Sovereignty Council, and one to the metro Omaha area and in partnership with No More Empty Pots. NDE and Extension will continue to partner and offer this training in more locations, incorporating the curriculum into existing opportunities and determining where impact of the training will be great.

[Nebraska Harvest of the Month](#) was first developed in 2017 to leverage teaching about seasonality. The program continues to expand with plans to publish materials specific for Early Childhood and Education providers, Afterschool providers, summer programs, Nebraska Indigenous Foods, and offers resources for producers. Harvest of the Month is often an entry point for schools stepping into local procurement; and for producers who can target HOM products and navigate advance planning for specific items. Nebraska MarketMaker is taking shape to help make the buyer/seller connection, even revolving around HOM as a base, as well as utilization of Local Food for Schools funds.

WISCONSIN

The [Wisconsin Local Foods Database](#) was developed by WI AmeriCorps Farm to School members. The database helps to connect schools to local producers. Producers request to add their business to the database, including their location within the state, the products they offer by month, delivery information, liability insurance, and willingness to be a guest speaker at a school and/or host field trips. Schools access this data to find producers near them that sell directly to schools and can add their name to a list of those willing to buy.

Racial and Social Equity

Introduction

The organizing and movement in support of farm to school and early care rests on a foundation of movement in support of racial and social equity. The National Farm to School Network cites that “access to healthy food is a challenge, most pronounced in low-income communities of color, and disparities exist in the quality, variety, quantity and price of food available. More than 1 in 5 children are at risk of hunger, and among African-Americans and Latinos, the number is 1 in 3.” The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerated existing food insecurity for communities of color and low income communities- including schools and early care and education sites- increasing the disparity gap for historically underserved populations.

As farm to school and early care is a strategy that provides opportunities to address these racial and social disparities in the existing food system, state coalitions and networks can engage internally as a group and externally with communities across the state or organize for sustainable shifts and changes in how our food system works and who it works for.

Process

In August 2022, partners convened to discuss topics related to racial and social equity in farm to school and early care work happening within their states (see table 2). This information was assessed and evolved into a series of best practices and recommendations related to navigating and supporting local food supply chains, especially in response to COVID-19.

Racial and Social Equity Topics	Description and Context
Systems of Governance Embedded in Coalitions	Coalition Structure and Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Examples of racial equity action statemes, visions, assessments being used by coalitions and individual organizations- Racial equity working groups within networks and coalitions- Attaining funding for racial equity consultants
	Diversifying Coalition Membership <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Racially, geographically, by organizational affiliation- Consideration of social constructs of culture that affect equity- Finding and obtaining funding for communities with lived experience to participate and influence decision making
Network and Community Engagement	Incorporating food justice curriculum within school gardens or educational components of farm to school; sharing information and background with schools and ECE on why our current food system is unjust; tailoring local food education programs to different cultures; supporting Native Farm to

	School and food sovereignty.
National Engagement and Partners	National Farm to School Network's Call to Action: What does this engagement look like across states and regions, especially in regards to racial and social equity?
Navigating Challenges	Staying committed to transformative work amidst political and policy-based challenges; managing pushback from partner organizations regarding enhanced focus and funding in support of racial and social equity.
Table 2: Topics of Discussion and Context for Racial and Social Equity Conversation	

Best Practices: Racial and Social Equity

1. Prioritize Funding for Racial Equity to Collaboratively Inform and Support Projects and Evaluation

The state coalitions and representatives working collaboratively on farm to school and early care initiatives across the Midwest are predominately white. It is important for these groups to prioritize continued learning, evaluation and systemizing of racial and social equity in their internal group work. Systemized funding for racial equity consultants to guide and inform projects to advance food justice is one example of how coalitions can sustainably fund and improve their efforts. Guidance and continual assessment creates understanding of how historical and contemporary racism affects food systems we live and work within.

IOWA

Prioritizing Long-Term Partnership in Support of Racial Equity in Iowa

The following excerpt is from the coalition's charter, for current and new members to review and understand: "Working at the intersection of education and food in an increasingly demographically diverse state, the coalition identifies equity as a core value that needs continued assessment. The coalition consistently works to adopt and refine a racial equity framework to analyze and shift decision-making through network development, program implementation and policy education, and is actively working to diversify the group's largely white, state agency-led membership."

With this, the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition contracted with the [Institute for Public Health Innovation](#) (IPHI), a racial equity consulting organization, to guide the operationalization of racial equity within the coalition's systems of governance from 2020-2022. In 2020, coalition members participated in discussion and training regarding racial and social equity at all coalition meetings. The coalition adopted a consent-based decision-making framework, is centering processes for community engagement and assessing power, and uses a DEI assessment for conference and event planning. IPHI consultants continue to support the writing and implementation of a robust [racial equity vision statement and action statement](#) and the development of a [racial equity reflection tool](#) for projects and planning.

Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition members facilitated an early childhood learning collaborative to deepen and expand farm to ECE practices and policy within four child care programs. Child care staff involved in the collaborative were poised to serve as mentors of other childcare programs interested in farm to ECE. As equity training is an important piece of programming, IPHI facilitated racial equity training within this group.

In March 2023, sub-grant opportunities were launched by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach for licensed childcare centers and registered child development homes to implement farm to ECE. Childcare providers who identified with one of the following were awarded an additional \$1000 of social equity funding:

- BIMPOC provider (BIMPOC: Black, Indigenous, Mixed People of Color)
- LGBTQIA+ provider
- Provider with low-income (defined: providers making less than \$40,000 per year)
- Disabled provider
- Refugee and immigrant provider

MINNESOTA

Policy to Create Emerging Farmers' Working Group

A [Minnesota Emerging Farmers' Working Group](#) was created in the [2020 Legislative Session](#). The purpose of the working group is: "To advise the commissioner and legislature regarding the development and implementation of programs and initiatives that support emerging farmers in this state," and the working group consists, to the extent possible, "of persons who are, and organizations that represent, farmers or aspiring farmers who are women, veterans, persons with disabilities, American Indian or Alaskan Natives, members of a community of color, young, and urban, and any other emerging farmers as determined by the commissioner." The group was established following [MDA's Emerging Farmers in Minnesota Legislative Report](#). Additionally, in 2022, MDA established an [Emerging Farmers Office](#) with a full time position, now expanded to include additional staffing.

WISCONSIN

The DPI School Nutrition Team is taking part in the DPI's State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship Program. This provides a paid summer internship to a student to learn more about farm to school and advance farm to school practices within the state. Projects include promotion of and assistance with the Farm to School: Into the School Garden and Onto the School Menu trainings, development of promotional materials for schools to use to highlight their use of local foods (i.e., sample social media posts, flyers, and menu signage) and a Cucumber Crunch guide. The internship is 15-20 hours per week.

2. Give Intention to Equity in Systems of Governance, Especially Decision-Making

Groups with statewide influence are consistently in the position to be making decisions that impact more than just the decision-making group. While every stakeholder impacted by this work cannot feasibly be included in every decision, it is within the purview of the network or coalition to ensure participation by all coalition members. In addition, this group must consider power dynamics within the group, across the different individuals and organizations who participate. As decision making processes are necessarily employed to keep groups and projects moving, coalitions should prioritize time toward determining and training on their preferred method. There are many frameworks for practicing equitable decision-making. One used by the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition is detailed below.

IOWA

Consent-Based Decision-Making

In 2021, the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition completed a training series with [Circle Forward](#) and adopted a consent-based decision-making process to make collective, equitable decisions on topics impacting the coalition at large. Some general principles include that each member has equal rights, all decision-making meetings will be scheduled with at least two weeks of advance notice in order to draft a proposal and vote on that proposal if quorum is met.

Taught to the coalition by Circle Forward, the consent principle means that a decision has been made when none of the identified participants in the decision have any significant objection to it; i.e. when no one can identify a risk that they cannot afford to take. When participants state an objection, typically it involves conflicts with the network's purpose, strategies, or the creation of conditions that would make it very difficult for a participant to perform their role. Under those conditions, the group or person would be "out of their range of tolerance" in supporting the choice as stated. This difference of opinion creates an opportunity for dialogue: to inquire about and gain an understanding of the reasoning behind the objection, and through that process find solutions to generate more choices, address the objection, and bring the system back within its range of tolerance. Objection(s) are supported by reasons that can be understood by other members.

While this form of equitable decision-making has taken time to learn and at times, has made for very slow movement on decisions, it has become a key practice for making sure all coalition members have space to share voice and opinion on key group decisions. More information about the coalition's consent based decision making framework can be accessed in the coalition's charter, [linked here](#).

3. Honor and Integrate Folx with Lived-Experience into State Program Development

Strategies that include an active community voice extends power to those most affected by decisions, allowing lived experience to determine priority areas annually and for the long term. Integrating folx with the voice and lived-experience that can inform grant writing and decision making can happen through hosting focus groups, working toward diversified coalitions or stakeholder groups, inviting community representatives to the decision-making table or meeting them at theirs. In all cases and strategies, relationship-building with community members is at the heart of these efforts and compensation for peoples' time and energy should always be made available.

MINNESOTA

External Evaluation to Understand Accurate Grantee Experience

As the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Farm to School and Early Care grant has shifted to a local food purchase reimbursement model and expanded beyond K12 schools to include early care providers as eligible applicants, stakeholders have valued having an external evaluation process to capture the program's impact and identify potential improvements in implementation. The nonprofit [Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy](#) (IATP) and the [University of Minnesota Extension](#) are partnering to conduct evaluation activities and sharing results back with MDA to use in planning the expansion of the grant program. The evaluation process has included analysis of purchasing records to identify economic impact, digital surveys of grantees and farmers, and focus groups and interviews with grantees to capture their experience of the grant. The initial evaluation report is linked [here](#).

NEBRASKA

The Nebraska Farm to School Network development project, funded by FY22 USDA Farm to School grant funds, will have representation from diverse stakeholder groups, prioritizing partnerships with organizations and individuals who are culturally underrepresented and/or offer culturally relevant farm to school perspectives and lessons.

Several workshops and sessions have been offered across stakeholder groups to elevate indigenous foodways and food sovereignty as a topic and value, with farm to school as the avenue for context. Native partners are planning and implementing sessions in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education: Bringing the Farm to School producer training; Nebraska School Nutrition Association; Nebraska Career Education; and Nebraska Administrator Days. At the 2022 and 2023 Administrator's Days Conference we addressed

SEL and outdoor nature-based education with the Umonhon Nation Public School (2022) and Food Sovereignty Across Programs (2023); the Nebraska Career Education Conference, June 2023, *Exploring Lessons in Food Sovereignty*, with the Comunidad Mayan Pixan Ixim, Center for Rural Affairs, and Isanti Community Schools; as well as the Winnebago Food Sovereignty Council and tribal members at the Producer Training in October 2022 (mentioned above).

Nebraska Harvest of the Month is expanding to feature indigenous foods, resources, and curriculum. Program and curriculum writers are native people directly involved in food sovereignty efforts on tribal lands in Nebraska. The Nebraska Department of Education houses the Harvest of the Month program and partnered with the Center for Rural Affairs (Lyons, NE) to expand the program to include Indigenous foods. In an effort to seamlessly introduce the indigenous content for all student learners and teachers, it is integrated throughout the full HOM toolkit and accessible and relatable across school programs, classrooms, and meal programs. An additional expansion will come soon, in partnership with Comunidad Mayan Pixan Ixim, to further grow and connect indigenous voices and values.

NDE works with a native advisory council to plan and host the Nebraska Native Youth Gathering - elevating Native/Indigenous voices on the planning team, featuring only Native/Indigenous speakers, sessions including Indigenous Food Sovereignty & History, the practice of food as medicine, and highlighting our Farm to School program at the conference.

4. Partner with Communities to Celebrate and Share Culturally Sustaining Food and Food Education

Offering culturally sustaining food recognizes the connections we have with food, which are not all nutrition-based. While serving culturally appropriate food empowers those from diverse backgrounds and allows folx to identify with their own culture, it also creates a sense of togetherness by embracing differences and experiences of other cultures.

NEBRASKA

The NDE offers the Nebraska Harvest of the Month program to celebrate and promote seasonal and local Nebraska foods. The program provided a backbone for creation of the Local and Indigenous Foods Training (LIFT), a program that educates food service staff, students, and farmers on the benefits of using local foods in school meal programs. LIFT worked in tandem with development of Nebraska Harvest of the Month Indigenous Foods- including native corn, dry beans, winter squash, summer squash, and native herbs. Further, LIFT engages students in creating and testing recipes, while developing and marketing recipes and local foods for use in the school meal programs. Partners who informed and developed the program include the Center for Rural Affairs tribal team and Comunidad Mayan Mixan Ixim.

SOUTH DAKOTA

SDSU Extension included Lakota language in their educational resource, “Pick it! Try it! Like it! Preserve it!” which is used across the state in partnership with SNAP-Ed and is available to the public. The SD Department of Education, Intertribal Bison Cooperative, USDA, and SDSU Extension partnered to write and publish “Frequently Asked Questions for Serving Bison and Beef in Child Nutrition Programs in South Dakota.”

ILLINOIS

The [Illinois Harvest of the Month \(HOTM\) toolkit](#) features culturally appropriate recipes, a Definition of Culturally Appropriate Meals and Recipes one-pager and links to resources available for Culturally Appropriate recipes and menu celebrations.

WISCONSIN

The [American Indian Traditional Foods Toolkit](#) was created with a 2016 USDA Support Services grant with the purpose of increasing the utilization of traditional foods in school meal programs. The project also included the design of 5 Nutrition Education videos, featuring bison, cranberries, maple syrup, the three sisters, and wild rice. It continues to be a

valuable resource for education on traditional foods, how they can be utilized within school meal programs, and recipes.

The [Harvest of the Moon](#) materials, developed by the Menominee Tribe offer a culturally significant plant, food, or medicine for each month of the year. The Harvest of the Moon school-based program was created to strengthen connections to food through the integration of Menominee language, the Menominee Moons, Menominee art and culture.

5. Attend to Growing Social Emotional Capacity as a State Team or Coalition

The tendency to avoid discomfort is a main barrier to effectively engaging in conversation and transformative change toward racial and social justice. By growing a social emotional capacity to engage in uncomfortable conversation, a state team or coalition increases its awareness of words and actions that can cause harm, mitigates occurrences that create negative conflict, creates a community of respect so that members care more for one another, and sets a foundation of respect and expectations of respect and care. In addition, this culture will support the group to remain resilient through push-back against racial and social equity efforts.

IOWA

In Iowa, determining shared language and assessment around racial equity work has enhanced the group's stamina for engaging in training and discussion of racial and social equity. Within this process, the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition formed a Racial Equity Working Group in 2020 to support the development of the following:

- Community agreements: The Coalition begins each meeting with statements that create a safe and equitable environment in which members can share their thoughts
- [Racial Equity Assessment Tool](#): This tool is intended to be utilized by Coalition members and Strategy Teams in planning, beginning a new project, or assessing current and past projects prior to its development.
- [Racial Equity Vision and Action Statement](#): In partnership with IPHI, the Racial Equity Working Group developed these, which were adopted by the Coalition via a consent-based decision making process.

Partnerships for Policy Change

Introduction

[The National Farm to School Network](#), a national voice for the farm to school and early care movement and a leading resource for information about national, state, and local policies that impact farm to school, works consistently to inform and connect states around federal and local policy movements. Federal, state and local policies affect a community's ability to implement farm to school and early care practices, so it is critical to stay informed and share farm to school stories with decision makers. State coalitions and networks are well positioned to do this with statewide reach, representation and influence.

Process

In November 2022, partners met to discuss topics related to partnerships that work in support of policy change in farm to school and early care work happening within their states (see table 3). This information was assessed and evolved into a series of best practices and recommendations related to navigating and supporting local food supply chains, especially in response to COVID-19.

Partnerships for Policy Change Topics	Description and Context
Policy Examples: Current and Historical	Share out of example policies that exist in each state influencing Farm to School and Early Care; Farm to School month declaration or other days of celebration recognized statewide.
	Digging out policies about farm to school or local foods that have been shelved- building more support for them the second time around.
Examples of Partnership and Network Building	Examples of advocacy partners who directly advance legislation; Examples of partnerships with organizations working in policy connected to farmers and others in the food system.
	State agency staff are limited in how they can work on policy at the legislative level- how are partnerships with community based organizations supporting this gap and being prioritized?
Policy Strategy Share Out	Considerations and best practices for gathering data and evaluation metrics to justify the need for new policy; processes for prioritizing farm to school and ECE policy needs in the state; wellness policies and other little “p” policy opportunities at the site level; Statewide food plans; Advocating for greater funding to hire program staff while being an employee of the state.

Table 3: Topics of Discussion and Context for Partnerships for Policy Change Conversation

Best Practices: Partnerships for Policy Change

1. Engage Partners and State Networks Intentionally to Base-Build

To advance investment in and support of farm to school and early care initiatives, state networks work to build a base, a group of stakeholders who stand to benefit from the goals and outcomes of this work. Engaging partners across the state in ongoing events, training, programs and relationship development prepares a base of stakeholders to grow local support. Purposeful base building via education and awareness building is a form of organizing that state agencies and other non-lobbying groups can potentially lead and participate in.

Defined by the [National Council of Nonprofits](#), lobbying, another form of organizing, is communicating with decision makers (elected officials and staff; voters on ballot measures), about existing or potential legislation, and urging a vote for or against. "Lobbying is a very narrow type of advocacy; all three components of this definition are required: decision makers, actual legislation, AND asking for a vote. Satisfying the three-part test is required and rarely is a "substantial part" of an organization's expenses." It's important for state networks to inform partners of these definitions so they may engage and support organizing efforts effectively and legally.

MISSOURI

In 2020 and 2022, the Governor of Missouri signed an [October Farm to School Month proclamation](#), declaring October to be Farm to School Month across the state. Awareness building in this way is an effective way to inform and engage local partners and media across the state. State organizers are hoping to include early care and education in next year's proclamation.

MINNESOTA

Several different groups have been supporting Farm to School and Early Care legislation in Minnesota, and anti-hunger groups have been major partners in this work. Erin McKee serves on the "Partners to End Hunger" Coalition in Minnesota. She shares that this group is doing statewide organizing to link the farm and food systems partners together to coordinate their state and federal advocacy efforts under a coalition called "[MinneAg](#)." This group includes partners from the Minnesota Farmers' Union, Land Stewardship Project, MN350, and many other individual and agency partners seeking to organize and advance people-centered policies that support farmers, communities, and our climate. .

WISCONSIN

[The Healthy School Meals for All Wisconsin Coalition](#) is led by State Representatives Francesca Hong and Kristina Shelton, Senator Chris Larson, and the School Nutrition Association. Wisconsin aims to secure funding to provide free meals to all students in schools that participate in the USDA National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Governor Evers included the “Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids” program in the Wisconsin State Budget for 2023-25 to fully fund breakfast and lunch for all children and to make it easier for schools to provide locally sourced foods from Wisconsin farmers and food producers.

2. Practice Tracking Annual Legislative Progress- Share with Regional and National Partners

While the legislative calendar and length of the legislative session differs by state, tracking and organizing the status of different initiatives can take place year round. As state networks educate their base around the progress of relevant bills and measures, they are sharing news of new bills being introduced, new partners signing on, opportunities for community meetings, and so on. While these measures keep a base of stakeholders engaged and informed, state networks can benefit from also sharing updates and progress with regional and national partners.

IOWA

In 2016, the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children received a planning grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for farm to early care and education (ECE). The grant effectively allowed flexibility in the work, which supported new and developing partners for statewide collaboration. Recognizing the need for a strong food system partner in addition to the early childhood association, W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a grant to the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU). A strength of IFU is policy work, and the union brought State Public Policy Group (SPPG) on board to work with the Iowa Farm to School and Early Care Coalition to effectively create policy and advocacy opportunities for the coalition and network.

3. Collaboratively Determine Policy Priorities, Focusing on Impact

A unified message communicated with decision-makers is emblematic of a strong network and clear call to action. Consistent language, plans and recommendations coming from multiple partners and cross-sector partners can encourage decision-makers at all levels to support change. For farm to school and early care, organizing in this way has supported the creation of new state-funded positions, grant programs and state task forces.

MINNESOTA

[Minnesota's AGRI Farm to School Grants](#) are statewide, reimbursement-based grants that have been funded annually by the state legislature since 2019. Each year, grant applications open in the fall and schools can apply to a two-year grant cycle and one of two-grant options:

- [First Bite Mini Grants](#) provide funding for those with little or no experience with local procurement as part of a Farm to School program. This grant is intended to be an intentional learning process for the applicant. First Bite Grant recipients from FY 2020 and 2021 must apply for a Full Tray Grant.
- [Full Tray Grants](#) are for those with some Farm to School experience. The amount of funding the applicant is eligible for is determined using a formula based on meals served in October 2021.

In 2023, Minnesota's USDA Local Food for Schools grant significantly expanded the funding available and allocated, with over \$4 million dollars committed to schools, increased limits, and no match required for schools. Kate Seybold, with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, shared that the policy development process for Minnesota's grant program was years in the making and that many stakeholders came together to make it happen.

In addition to the school grant program, Minnesota also piloted a [Farm to ECE mini-grant program](#) with funds from the Farm to ECE Implementation Grant (FIG) awarded by the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists.

NEBRASKA

In 2020, partners in Nebraska participated in a task force to draft an interim study of farm to school efforts and needs in the state. The accompanying legislative resolution, [LR337](#), stated that "This interim study shall reexamine which Nebraska-grown food products can feasibly be used for school meals and snacks, including use of appropriate preservation methods of local foods by school nutrition staff for use later in the school year, and shall review existing regulations of the Department of Agriculture, Department of Education,

Department of Health and Human Services, and other authorities that may impact the supply of Nebraska-grown foods provided to local schools. In addition, the study shall assemble a catalog of where farm to school activities are happening in the state, along with volume and cost totals for foods locally sourced, to provide insight into best practices as well as barriers that are impeding participation.

This interim study was successful in that it led to [LB396](#) in 2021, which continues to fund a state position at the Nebraska Department of Education. Sarah Smith, partner on this networking group, now serves as the statewide coordinator of Nebraska farm to school, making connections between producers and schools and working toward increasing local purchasing at educational institutions statewide.