

Cafeteria Chronicles: Procuring Local Food

Is your district buying local?

Procuring locally grown (or raised) food can support your local economy, provide familiarity in your school meals and not to mention that fresh-off-the-farm taste! Hear from districts that were awarded Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Awards, on behalf of the USDA and Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), for improving their school meals with locally procured food.

See how districts nationwide are serving local food at school in this [video](#).

Located near the Rio Grande Valley, **Rio Rancho Public School District** in Rio Rancho, NM, used grant funds through New Mexico Grown to procure proteins and produce for their school meals from local farmers and ranchers. Local proteins are featured in their Tacos, Pozole, and Chili recipes, while the salad bar includes local produce in their salsa, red chiles, and green chiles. Incorporating locally raised proteins and locally grown produce has been so successful for the district, they plan to set aside budget funds for the upcoming school year to ensure they can continue to purchase food locally for their school meals.

Food hubs can offer school districts flexibility to procure local food. The school nutrition team at **Eastern Allamakee Community School District** in Lansing, IA, learned this after a Project SCALES grant (also funded by HMI) secured funding to work with a local food hub. For smaller districts like Eastern Allamakee, procuring food through a food hub created a local supply chain to purchase items for their school lunch. Their recipe for Butternut Squash and Apple Hash features local squash, apples and sage, and was a hit with students when it rolled out during fall. More than 25% of the district's meals are now sourced from local products, with plans to expand in the future.

Teaching students about the local food you serve is another benefit of buying locally. The team at **Colton Joint Unified School District** in Colton, CA, developed a Mini Farmers Market to teach students about where food comes from in a creative way. Students learned about locally grown foods by touching, tasting, and asking questions directly to farmers. Students and staff also got to visit a local farm to see how the oranges served at school are grown.

Switching to local, fresh proteins may improve nutrition in your school meals as well. After making the switch from processed ground beef with added salt to local, minimally processed beef, the nutrition team at **Belgrade School District 44** in Belgrade, MT, This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Administration. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

saw sodium levels drop. Thanks to the HMI grant funding, the district was able to begin working with local beef/cattle ranchers, and students love the taste of the local beef. The district plans to expand sourcing all of the beef from local ranchers in the near future.

Hats off to these districts procuring local food and leading the way in school nutrition!