

Recommendations for Future Years of 10 Cents

10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms, administered by the Michigan Department of Education, matches what participating schools and other non-school sponsors spend on Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and dry beans with grants of up to 10 cents per meal. This brief is part of the *10 Cents a Meal 2021-2022 evaluation results: Amplifying Impact with More Michigan Farms and Foods*.

As evaluators, we collect survey responses and purchasing information submitted by participating food program managers (FPMs) that allow us to see how 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms (10 Cents) works from different aspects of the program. This summary includes recommendations for the future of 10 Cents from its program evaluators.

First, the updates listed below are related to recommendations from last year's evaluation report (2020-2021).³²

1 Provide targeted technical assistance to individual grantees over the program year:

Although Michigan Department of Education (MDE) program administrators have been building capacity to provide greater assistance throughout the year, this goal should continue and is discussed further in the following 2021-2022 recommendations.

2 Conduct additional communication to boost survey response rate in the summer.

This recommendation was successfully implemented by program administrators. The response rate for this year's August survey was 86%, a significant increase from 67% during the previous year (2020-2021).

3 Provide regular oversight and education about eligible products and vendors.

Program administrators are continuing to build their staff capacity to regularly monitor the eligibility of products and vendors submitted by grantees throughout the year. There is also much work to be done with vendors related to providing farm of origin information for the Michigan-grown products they sell, which is discussed further in the following 2021-2022 recommendations.

³² Refer to [Expanded Eligibility, Increased Impacts: 10 Cents a Meal 2020-2021 Evaluation Results](#).

4 Consider analysis of the forms of products purchased by grantees.

Data to meet this recommendation continues to be an opportunity for future collection and evaluation. Most purchases in 2021-2022 did not specify the product form so therefore, no findings related to product forms were included in this report. This information would be especially beneficial to farmers and food suppliers who wish to know the Michigan-grown minimally processed foods that grantees seek to purchase in future program years.

5 Continue to track and analyze key characteristics of grantees and their usage of the program.

In this evaluation, comparisons were made among public school grantees in 2021-2022, which are described in the summary, [A Closer Look at Public School Grantees Participating in 10 Cents](#). As more grantees participate in the future, we can seek more generalizable results for public school grantees and examine characteristics related to other types of grantees such as childcare sponsors.

6 Continue to gather feedback from grantees about the influence of the pandemic on 10 Cents participation and food service operations.

Evaluation results in 2021-2022 showed that supply chain issues continued to present barriers to grantees, with many similar challenges as those reported by grantees in previous years of the program, and during the height of the pandemic. It will be useful to continue to track reported barriers over time to monitor how these barriers impact the food service programs of grantees, and their use of the 10 Cents program.

7 Do not use comparisons between grant awards and grantee spending as a representation of how grantees use the program.

This recommendation was accepted, and no comparisons were included in this report since there is no strict rule for how many grantees are accepted or how much they are awarded. Grantee participation can be influenced by many factors, such as grantees who drop out of the program, or grantees who may request additional funds.

8 Visualize and further analyze the impact of 10 Cents on children and communities.

This recommendation remains an opportunity for future evaluation. Since last year, however, MDE has added personnel with geographic mapping skills. As they build capacity to support the 10 Cents program, discussion has continued around visualization of the statewide impact of 10 Cents in the future.

The following recommendations are for both evaluation purposes and the practice of the program going forward.

1

Continue providing targeted technical assistance to individual grantees over the program year.

Similar to previous years, the opportunity remains to provide more targeted technical assistance to grantees related to local food purchasing. In last year's evaluation report³³, we shared that some FPMs found it difficult to spend their initial grant award amount plus matching requirement because they struggled to find local sources with sufficient volumes of Michigan-grown foods to meet their needs. Again this year, many grantees shared feedback and responses about their difficulty finding sources for local foods, specifically finding and connecting to local farms and food suppliers including those with adequate volumes of local foods. Some grantees even requested curated lists of farms and food suppliers near them.



I honestly need help with all of it. I don't have any connections to purchase Michigan-grown product.

— Public school district grantee



I need help increasing my access to local farmers that are willing to service my breakfast and lunch programs.

— Public school district grantee

Based on this feedback, more individual technical assistance could greatly help grantees find and buy more Michigan-grown produce. This assistance could cover specific topics such as identifying and developing relationships with farmers and local food suppliers that are a good fit for specific grantees and using local foods in food service programs. Additionally, MDE staff are also creating a vendor guide for grantees who will list farmers and vendors they already use as a group, as reported through required purchasing information. Our evaluation findings show a strong demand for Michigan-grown foods from grantees, but additional assistance is still needed to help them find, purchase, and serve more local foods.

2

Continue advocating for farm of origin information for Michigan-grown foods from food suppliers.

Per 10 Cents legislation, 10 Cents grantees are required to report the farms of origin for their purchases of Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes to be reimbursed. This year, nearly a third (34%) of all 10 Cents purchases did not include a farm of origin, which could be related to the ability of grantees to find this information through their suppliers, especially distributors and/or processors. Some vendors may not provide or display the farms of origin for specific products at the point of sale, on invoices, or in velocity/purchasing reports.

³³ Refer to [Expanded Eligibility, Increased Impacts: 10 Cents a Meal 2020-2021 Evaluation Results](#).

Consequently, this can make it difficult for grantees to obtain and report this information along with their invoices. Throughout the year, grantees shared responses in evaluation surveys related to the need for this information from suppliers, including broadline distributors.



We work with a vendor. I am concerned the vendor may not be using locally-sourced food, and I am concerned that I may not get the required documentation from the vendor in order to comply with the requirements of the grant.

— Public school grantee



We need to be able to have the farm and county information available. I spent many hours reaching out to distributors, manufacturers trying to get that information. Was not very successful.

— Public school district grantee

Verification of qualified vendors with eligible products is an ongoing task of MDE and 10 Cents team staff, who keep, add to, and share such records across years. Additionally, 10 Cents grantees can and should continue to ask their vendors for the information they need for 10 Cents reimbursements. As the program has grown, some vendors have adapted their invoices to better suit 10 Cents grantee needs (and to capture additional sales grantees may bring) while others have shared their plans to work on this, as shared by grantees in survey responses.



Communication has improved with [vendor] through reaching out to see what is new or available and our representative reaches out to us to provide the information on what farms/locations that produce is coming from and that helps a lot.

— ECE grantee



[Vendor] is working on providing a way to know what produce is coming from local farms in Michigan due to school's participating in the 10 Cent grant program. I hope they are able to provide us with that information as it would be so much easier to order through them than doing a separate order through [another vendor].

— Public school district grantee

Continuing to work with and ask food vendors to provide better transparency and communication about which of their offered products are Michigan-grown would help grantees greatly, and also contribute to increased information for all institutional and other buyers in the local food marketplace in Michigan. As the 10 Cents program continues to grow, it is crucial that food suppliers accommodate grantee needs by providing farm of origin data for their products.

3 Collect data and track participation of Early Care and Education (ECE) grantees.

Early care and education (ECE) sites have been participating in 10 Cents since eligibility expanded in 2020.³⁴ They are of interest to farm to school practitioners and supporters because of their inherent differences in food program operations compared to other 10 Cents grantees, particularly public school districts. ECEs vary greatly in program size, ranging from small home settings to large daycare facilities, which is then reflected in the ways they purchase and serve food for children. National survey findings have shown that the top barrier to both starting and continuing farm to ECE activities is limited funding for supplies, highlighting the need for programs like 10 Cents.³⁵



I appreciate this program; it gives an incentive to be a provider caring for the younger population.

— ECE grantee

The number of ECE grantees increased by 20 (from 14 to 34) between 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. While this is an important increase, this number is still too small for accurate analyses or generalizations about participating ECEs as a group. As more ECEs participate in 10 Cents, it will be important to track their local food purchasing patterns and use of the program to see how they differ from other types of grantees and to identify their unique/specific needs to help them better use the program.

4 Consider broadening types of eligible expenses for the program, and help inform grantees about additional funding opportunities to better leverage 10 Cents funds.

10 Cents can help motivate grantees to purchase local foods, but there are many other factors than budgets that can influence a grantee's ability to purchase and serve local foods. As shared in evaluation survey feedback throughout the year, factors that may serve as barriers include food service labor and staff capacity, equipment, and storage. Some grantees have also expressed a desire for the program to cover additional non-food expenses to help them with these challenges in their overall food service or food program operations. This could ultimately allow them to purchase and serve more local foods through 10 Cents over time.



I don't have too many barriers besides some chronic short-staffing issues. I've been allowing them to order more ready-processed produce than I normally would, to spare them some work. Things like already washed and cut veggies, sliced apples, etc. Some of it is already local, but most of it is not...

— Public school district grantee

³⁴ ECE sites are settings that focus on the care and/or education and development of young children, such as childcare centers.

³⁵ Refer to the [2021 National Farm to Early Care and Education Survey Briefs](#).



I wish funds were provided to help with the prep of the fresh items, equipment like...food processors, slicers, dicers, wedgers.

— Public school district grantee



My obstacles have been farmers do not have storage to house produce till we can use it and our district does not have space to store extra produce.

— Public school district grantee

The 10 Cents program currently only funds Michigan-grown food purchases, including foods for supportive activities aside from the foods served in food programs. However, there are other funding opportunities that grantees could apply for or participate in to help with these other challenges. Some funds are more limited in their timeframe such as USDA Supply Chain Assistance (SCA) Funds that are distributed by the Michigan Department of Education as a response to supply chain challenges from the COVID pandemic, while others are longstanding annual USDA grant programs such as the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). Additional technical assistance is one way to help grantees take advantage of these various funds, including assistance in identifying funds that they may be eligible for and mapping requirements to apply. This way grantees can maximize their budgets and allow them to build the farm to school programs they need.

Evaluation of 10 Cents is led by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS). The work presented here is part of the *10 Cents a Meal 2021-2022 evaluation results: Amplifying Impact with More Michigan Farms and Foods* by Megan McManus and Colleen Matts, CRFS, and with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and 10 Cents administrative funds for partner organizations.

To learn more, visit tencentsmichigan.org, foodsystems.msu.edu/10-cents-a-meal, and mifarmtoschool.msu.edu.

