



WHAT A DIME CAN DO: An Evaluation of the 10 Cents a Meal Pilot

10 Cents a Meal for School Kids & Farms (10 Cents), administered by the Michigan Department of Education, matches what participating schools spend on Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes with grants of up to 10 cents per meal. This brief is part of What a Dime Can Do, an evaluation report on two years of the pilot program (2017-18 and 2018-19).

Farm to School Experience Matters: Insights from an Analysis of Food Service Director Behavior

Analysis of 10 Cents purchasing data from 2017-18 and 2018-19 shows there was a wide range in the number of fruit, vegetable, and legume (FVL) types that participating school food service directors (FSDs) purchased.¹ Two other program outcomes reveal further differences in how FSDs used the 10 Cents program: changes to the 10 Cents grant awards and changes in the number of FVL types purchased before and during the program. These differences and highlights of some emerging patterns underlying the diversity in food service behavior are explored below.

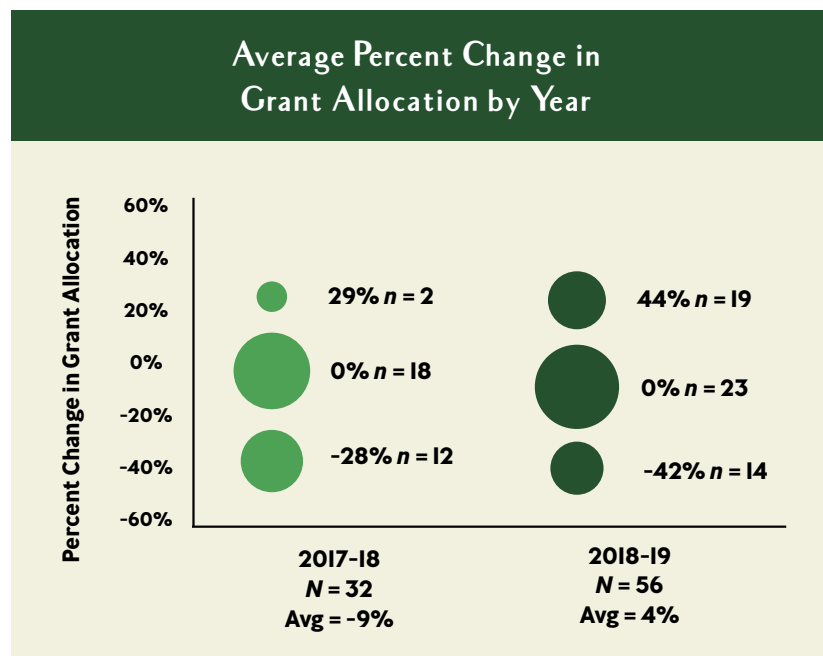
Changes in Grant Awards

Our findings suggest that **FSDs use grant dollars more fully as their experience with the program increases.** Midway through both the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years, staff at the Michigan Department of Education assessed how much of the required match amount each grantee had spent and determined whether their grant award should be increased or decreased.

“**FSDs use grant dollars more fully as their experience with the program increases.**”

Among the 27 districts that participated in both 2017-18 and 2018-19, only three spent less than they did the first year, relative to their original grant amount in their second year of the program. The other 24 grantees were either equally successful (10 districts) or more successful (14 districts) in spending their original grant amounts.

Only two of the 32 grantees² were allocated additional funds after the mid-year review in 2017-18, while 19 of the 56 grantees were provided additional grant funds after the mid-year review in 2018-19.³ The adjacent chart shows the average percent change in grant awards in both 2017-18 and 2018-19 for three groups: 1) grantees whose award increased, 2) grantees whose award stayed the same, and 3) grantees whose award decreased.



¹See 10 Cents on the Menu: Fruits, Vegetables, and Legumes Served Through the Year for additional information about patterns of fruit, vegetable, and legume purchases. ²Application data was unavailable for one of the 57 grantees in 2018-19, so this analysis includes only 56 districts.

Farm to School Experience Matters: Insights from an Analysis of Food Service Director Behavior (cont.)

Changes in Fruit, Vegetable, and Legume Types Purchased

Stakeholders see 10 Cents as a way to increase the diversity of fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals.³ To see if this increase was present in the data, we compared the number of FVL types FSDs reported purchasing in their 2018-19 applications for 10 Cents with the number of FVL types reflected in their program purchasing records.⁴

After looking at these numbers side by side, we divided the participating school districts into four categories based on whether the number of FVL types purchased prior to 10 Cents was relatively low or high compared with other grantees and whether the number of FVL types purchased during 10 Cents was relatively low or high compared with other grantees. These categories are shown in the following table.

Categories of Changes in Fruit, Vegetable, and Legume (FVL) Types Purchased by 2018-19 Grantees

For each of these categories and the group overall, we looked at the average number of FVL types purchased before and during the 2018-19 pilot year. (See figure below.) Of the 56 grantees, 22 FSDs, or approximately 40%, substantially increased the number of FVL types purchased during the program. Another 8 FSDs were able to maintain their purchases of a relatively high number of FVL types through the program. On the other hand, 18 grantees started and ended the program with a relatively low number of FVL types purchased. And most interestingly, 8 districts started with a relatively high number of FVL types purchased but ended with 10 fewer types of FVL purchased on average. In other words, **when looking at the breadth of FVL types purchased, different FSDs used and experienced the 10 Cents pilot differently.**

Low to High

- **22 FSDs** purchased at least 15 types of FVL during 10 Cents and increased the types of FVL they purchased by more than 50%.
- On average, this group purchased 11 types of FVL prior to the 2018-2019 10 Cents program and 22 types of FVL during the program.

High to High

- **8 FSDs** purchased at least 15 types of FVL during 10 Cents and increased the types of FVL they purchased by more than $\leq 50\%$.
- On average, this group purchased 21 types of FVL prior to the 2018-2019 10 Cents program and 23 types of FVL during the program.

Low to Low

- **18 FSDs** purchased at fewer than 15 types of FVL either prior to or during 10 Cents and/or their purchases changed by $\leq 50\%$
- On average, this group purchased 10 types of FVL prior to the 2018-2019 10 Cents program and 2 types of FVL during the program.

High to Low

- **8 FSDs** decreased the number of FVL types purchased by more than 50%.
- On average, this group purchased 16 types of FVL prior to the 2018-2019 10 Cents program and 6 types of FVL during the program.

Overall Average

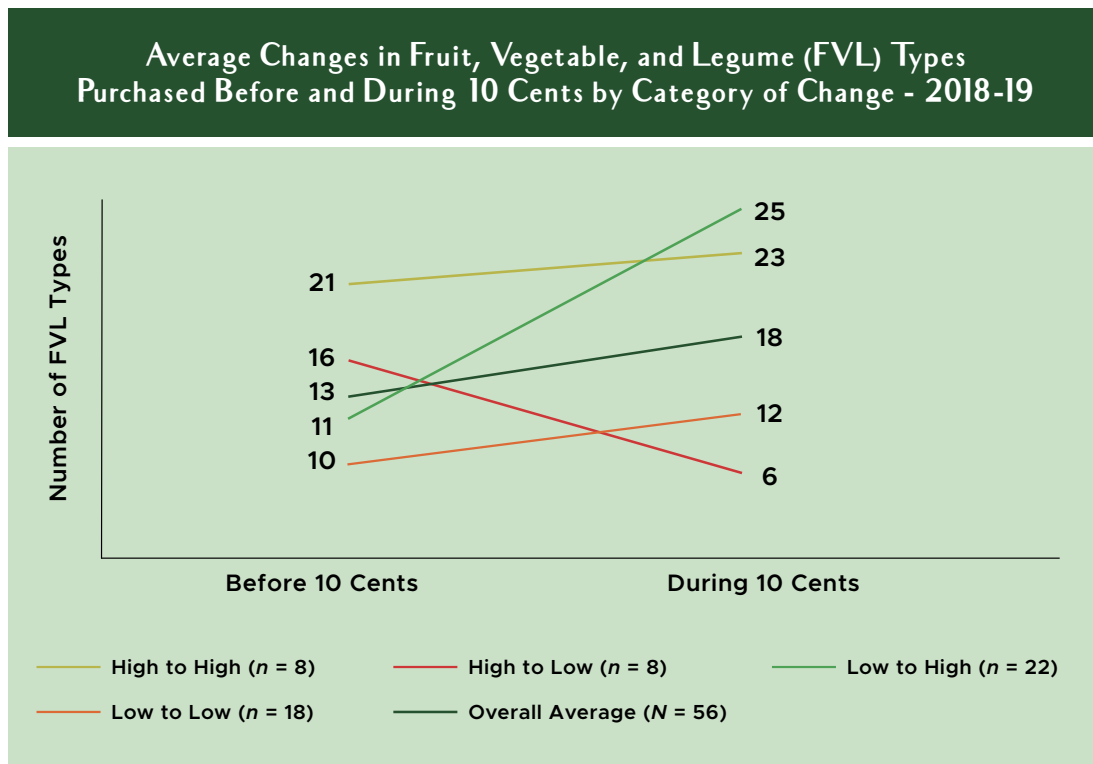
- The 56 FSDs purchased 13 types of FVL prior to the 2018-2019 10 Cents program and 18 types of FVL during the program on average overall.
- Overall, FSDs increased the types of FVL purchased during the program by 55%.

³Eight of the grantees whose award stayed the same were on track to spend more than their required match amount but because they had already been awarded the maximum of ten cents per school meal, they were ineligible to receive additional grant funds. ⁴See [Why 10 Cents Matters: A Framework](#) for this and other potential outcomes of 10 Cents.

Farm to School Experience Matters: Insights from an Analysis of Food Service Director Behavior (cont.)

Changes in Fruit, Vegetable, and Legume Types Purchased (cont.)

This chart shows the average changes in the number of FVL types purchased before 10 Cents and during the program for four different categories of grantees as well as the overall average. The change is calculated from the applications to participate and purchasing data from the grant year.



Explaining Changes in FVL Types Purchased

Assuming the comparison of FVL types purchased before and during 10 Cents is valid despite the different data sources,⁵ our evaluation findings point to two potential explanations for why some FSDs' purchases of FVL types either decreased or remained low.

- First, **one FSD interviewed reported difficulty sourcing eligible Michigan products, which led to purchasing fewer FVL types and more difficulty meeting the match required by the original grant amount.**⁶ The bar chart below shows that purchasing a low number of FVL types was associated with difficulty spending the full grant award for other FSDs as well. Both of the categories of FSDs who purchased a low number of FVL types during 10 Cents spent less than their initial grant amounts in 2018-19.
- In contrast, both of the categories of FSDs that purchased a high number of FVL types during 10 Cents were able to spend more than their original grant amount. This indicates a relationship between these two behaviors and means that the purchase of few FVL types could reflect FSDs who struggled to source Michigan foods.
- However, these relationships were less apparent in the 2017-18 data. This could be because there were fewer grantees overall that year. Furthermore, in 2017-18 there was only one grantee in the high to low category and only two whose grant awards increased, which made it harder to see trends. Even so, the nine grantees in the low-to-low category that year had the lowest average change in grant allocation with a decrease of 20%.

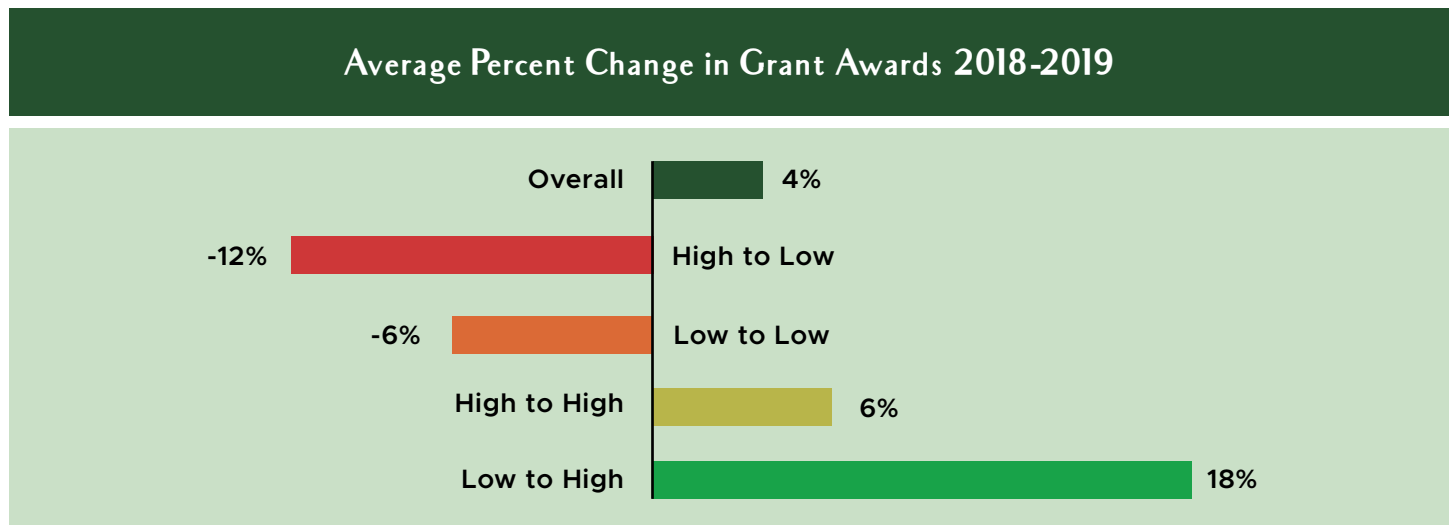
⁵ See the Technical Notes document for a detailed explanation of this comparison. ⁶ See School Food Service Directors Use 10 Cents Grants Differently: Insights from Interviews for additional detail about this FSD's experience.

Farm to School Experience Matters: Insights from an Analysis of Food Service Director Behavior (cont.)

Explaining Changes in FVL Types Purchased (cont.)

- Second, based on a small series of interviews with six FSDs, some FSDs chose to strategically use 10 Cents grants for certain types of purchases as just one component of their overall farm to school efforts.⁷ Because the 10 Cents purchasing records represent only a small portion of FSDs' overall purchases, **it is likely that some who purchased a small number of FVL types through 10 Cents actually purchased a much larger number of local FVL types in their food service program overall.** However, we do not have the data to show whether this explanation holds true.

This chart shows that the districts that purchased more types of FVL in the 10 Cents program were more likely to have their grant award increased.



In short, our analyses of purchasing and application data indicate a relationship between the number of FVL types purchased by FSDs and the ability to meet the match amount required by the original grant awards. However, interviews indicate that not all FSDs strive to purchase a large number of FVL types through 10 Cents. If that is the case, then the change in FVL types purchased is not a reliable indicator of optimal use of 10 Cents grants.

While purchasing relatively few FVL types may indicate challenges with local sourcing, it may also reflect challenges obtaining the required information on farm origin or different FSD priorities, such as serving local food as frequently as possible, purchasing foods that are not otherwise affordable, establishing new vendor relationships, or purchasing foods that represent the best value. Further evaluation with additional information about FSDs' goals for the 10 Cents program could help clarify these relationships.

The Influence of Experience

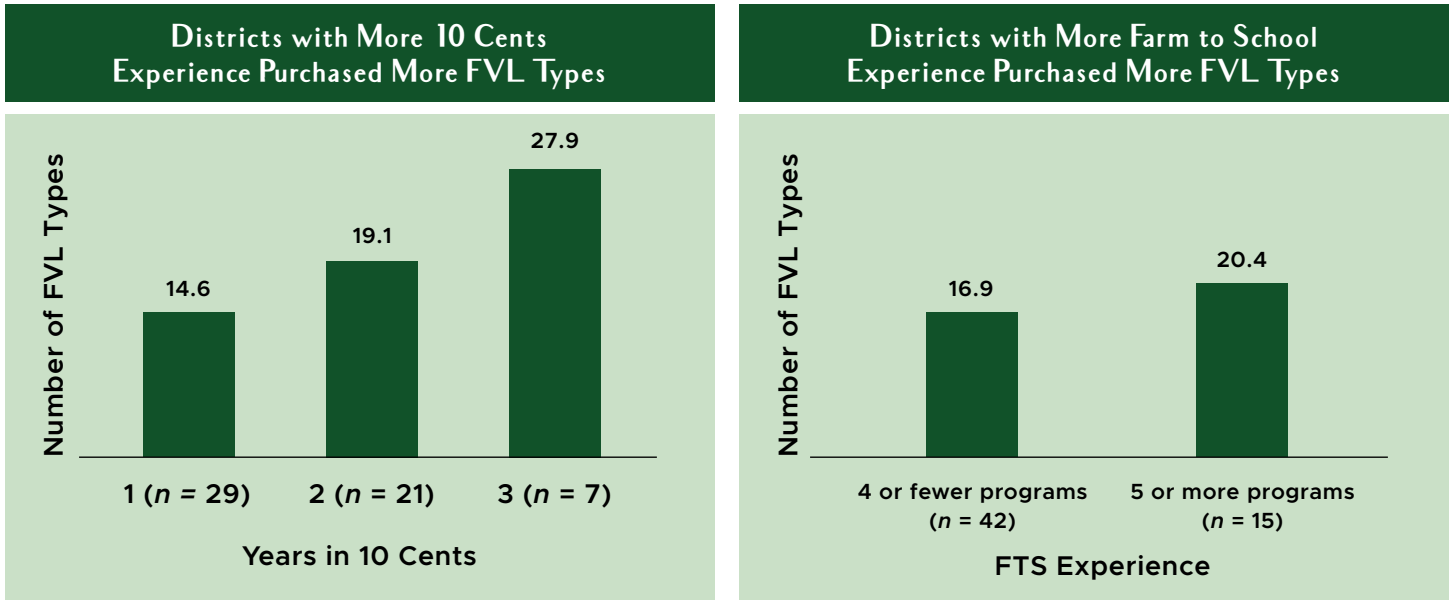
We consistently found that **more experience with farm to school programs⁸ correlated with the purchase of more types of FVL through 10 Cents.** This relationship was evident in three different ways.

- First, the longer grantees participated in 10 Cents, the more FVL types they purchased on average. There were, however, only 7 FSDs who participated in 10 Cents all three years, so this trend is based on a small sample.
- Second, as the number of years in which a grantee participated in one or more farm to school programs increased, the average types of FVL purchased also showed a general upward trend.⁹
- Third, grantees that had participated in five or more types of farm to school programs purchased more FVL types on average than those that had participated in four or fewer programs.

⁸ See Technical Notes for how we calculated farm to school experience. ⁹ See Technical Notes for the full data.

Farm to School Experience Matters: Insights from an Analysis of Food Service Director Behavior (cont.)

On the other hand, we did not see any relationship between farm to school experience and change in grant award, whether we looked at years of participation in 10 Cents, the years of participation in one or more farm to school programs, or the total number of different farm to school programs that FSDs participated in.



Note: These charts are based on 2018-19 purchasing records for 10 Cents. They show apparent relationships between the number of fruit, vegetable, and legume types purchased and, first, the number of years of participation in 10 Cents and, second, the number of types of farm to school programs, including 10 Cents.

Conclusion

In both 2017-18 and 2018-19, a portion of 10 Cents grantees (38% in 2017-18 and 25% in 2018-19) had difficulty spending enough on Michigan fruits, vegetables, and legumes to meet the match amount required by their initial original grant awards. The FSDs who struggled the most to meet the required match were also those who reported purchasing the fewest types of fruits, vegetables, and legumes through the program (including both those who reported purchasing a relatively high number and those who reported purchasing a relatively low number of FVL types before the program).

Our findings show that experience with both 10 Cents specifically and farm to school programs generally relates to the purchase of more FVL types during the program. However, this experience does not relate to changes in grant awards. Moreover, interview findings point to a range of explanations for purchasing a wide diversity of FVL types, only some of which relate to sourcing challenges.

In conclusion, farm to school experience seems to be related to effective use of the 10 Cents program if defined by the number of FVL types purchased. However, **a deeper understanding is needed of the perspective of FSDs on the extent to which diversity of product types is an appropriate goal of the program as well as the ways in which 10 Cents integrates with other farm to school programs or local sourcing efforts.** A broader set of interviews with FSDs could shed light on the range of their priorities for school food service programs and the ways in which they use 10 Cents and other programs to achieve these priorities.