

USDA Grants and Loans that Support Farm to School Activities

Funding from the US Department of Agriculture is available to assist farms, schools, and every link in between in feeding kids healthy local meals; teaching them about food, farming and nutrition; and supporting local agricultural economies. While the programs listed below provide a good starting point for those looking to bolster farm to school efforts, other USDA grant and loan programs support local food systems work as well. Visit www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer for more information.



Funding from the Food and Nutrition Service

Farm to School Grants

Summary: These grants help schools and their partners source more foods locally and provide complementary educational activities to students that emphasize food, farming, and nutrition. Currently, eligible schools can apply for *Planning* and *Implementation* funds, and a range of other eligible entities can apply for *Support Service* or *Conference and Event* funds.

Real example: Portland Maine Public Schools is using a Farm to School grant to update central kitchen equipment, certifications, and training in order to become a large-volume processor of local foods. The project also includes a number of experiential learning activities such as school gardens, after-school agriculture clubs, school curriculum, taste testing, and chef-to-school. The school district will also hold an annual "Local Food Show" open to the public exhibiting the farms, recipes, and student projects related to farm to school.

Learn more: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/grants>

Team Nutrition Training Grants

Summary: These grants allow State agencies to establish or enhance sustainable infrastructures for implementing Team Nutrition's goal of improving children's lifelong eating and physical activity habits. State agencies may re-grant funds to districts and in the past, several farm to school related projects have been supported.

Real example: The Idaho Department of Education has used Team Nutrition funds to strengthen farm to school technical assistance efforts by conducting a farm to school pilot study, creating several farm to school related manuals and hosting a state farm to school conference.

Learn more: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition-training-grants>

Equipment Assistance Grants

Summary: These grants (which are contingent upon Congressional approval of additional funds for future years) allow school food authorities to purchase equipment to serve healthier meals that meet the updated meal patterns, with an emphasis on serving more fruits and vegetables in school meals, improving food safety, and expanding access.

Learn more: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fiscal-year-2014-national-school-lunch-program-equipment-assistance-grants-school-food-authorities>

Funding from the Agricultural Marketing Service

Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Grants

Summary: These grants are intended to support the development and expansion of local and regional food business enterprises to increase consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets.

Learn more: www.ams.usda.gov/lfpp and www.ams.usda.gov/fmpp

Federal State Marketing Improvement Program

Summary: These grants are made for a variety of projects that explore barriers, challenges, and opportunities in marketing, transporting, and distributing food and forest products.

Learn more: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FSMIP>

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Summary: These funds are intended to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, defined as "fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). Grants are awarded to the state agencies responsible for agriculture, who are encouraged to partner with outside entities to address issues related to specialty crops.

The grants have been used to support school and community gardens, farm to school programs, and access to specialty crops in underserved communities.

Real example: USDA provided \$474,000 to the California Department of Food and Agriculture to partner with the University of California to work with several school districts and their regional partners to expand their procurement of local seasonal fresh produce, integrate a specialty crop nutritional curriculum by providing outreach and professional development to school personnel, and assess changes in food preferences and dietary behaviors of children in participating schools.

Learn more: www.ams.usda.gov/scbgpstatepocs

Funding from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Community Food Project Grants

Summary: These grants are intended to increase food security in communities by bringing the whole food system together to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs.

Real example: The National Center for Appropriate Technology is utilizing a \$298,000, three-year grant from Community Food Projects to develop farm to school programs in Montana's food deserts. In partnership with AmeriCorps, the organization has hired 11 service members to address rising obesity rates in children by connecting schools with nearby farms and ranches to serve healthy meals, building and tending school gardens, and educating students about how and why to eat nutritious foods. This Montana FoodCorps program has also inspired a national FoodCorps program.

Learn more: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>

Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grants

Summary: These grants are for organizations that train, educate, and provide outreach and technical assistance to new and beginning farmers on production, marketing, business management, legal strategies and other topics critical to running a successful operation.

Learn more: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/bfrdp/bfrdp.html>

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Grants

Summary: These grants are made to advance sustainable innovations in American agriculture. Three funding tracks are available: *Research and Education*, *Professional Development* and *Producers*.

Real example: A collaborative of tribal communities and farmers, ranchers and service providers in the Four Corner states taught nearly 500 producers and buyers about such topics as cold-frame building and season extension—very relevant for schools wanting to stretch the fall harvest into winter months.

Learn more: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=kyf_grants_nifa6_content.html

Agriculture, Food and Research Initiative Grants

Summary: A host of grants that support research in the areas of plant production and health, food safety, nutrition, natural resources, renewable energy, agricultural economics, rural communities, and agricultural technology.

Real example: The University of Wisconsin, Growing Power, Inc., Michigan State University, Iowa State University, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute and 10 community-based organizations received \$4,944,748 over five years to examine existing food systems and identify barriers to increasing local access to food. The team will then recommend sustainable food production, processing and distribution solutions that are responsive to local needs and conditions and open access to nutritious food to those who need it most. The specific focus is getting more healthy food into urban areas of Milwaukee, Chicago and Detroit, where food insecurity is extensive. The project is also creating research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students and developing curriculum for a pre-college enrichment program targeted at inner city high school students.

Learn more: <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/afri.html>

Funding from Rural Development

Community Facilities Grants and Loans

Summary: These grants and loans assist in the development of essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Projects that support local and regional food systems that may qualify for CF funding include, but are not limited to, the following: farmers markets (i.e. structures); school and community kitchens; food banks, including refrigerators; community gardens (i.e., purchase land; water source access) and noncommercial greenhouses; and refrigerated trucks.

Learn more: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/had-cf_grants.html

Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans

Summary: This program helps new and existing businesses based in rural areas gain access to affordable capital by guaranteeing loans made by private lenders. The 2008 Farm Bill placed a special emphasis on supporting businesses that establish and facilitate the processing, distribution, aggregation, storing and marketing of locally or regionally produced food products.

Learn more: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/busp/b&i_gar.htm

Rural Business Enterprise and Opportunity Grants

Summary: These grants support sustainable economic development in rural communities with exceptional needs and facilitate the development of small and emerging rural businesses and programs supporting training and technical assistance for business development.

Real example: Ecotrust, a non-profit organization located in Oregon, created FoodHub, an online marketplace that allows large-scale purchasers of food to connect with nearby growers. Through a \$250,000 Rural Business Opportunity Grant, USDA is supporting the recruitment of more producers and buyers in rural communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, and to provide training and technical assistance to ensure FoodHub is able to help their businesses grow.

Learn more: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_rbeg.html and http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_rbog.html

Value Added Producer Grants

Summary: Value-added processing and marketing helps farmers and ranchers receive a higher portion of the retail dollar. Value-Added Producer Grants support planning activities, such as developing a business plan, as well as working capital. Specific funds are available for projects that focus on local and regional supply networks or support beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and small or medium-sized farms or ranches. Grants may fund projects that: create a business plan to market value-added products; evaluate the feasibility of direct marketing freshly bottled milk; evaluate the financial benefits of processing and marketing meat versus selling live animals; expand marketing capacity for locally- and regionally-grown products; and expand processing capacity.

Learn more: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_VAPG.html

Rural Cooperative Development Grants

Summary: These grants support rural economic development through the creation or improvement of cooperative development centers. Cooperative development centers in turn provide assistance for starting up, improving, or expanding rural businesses, especially cooperatives.

Real example: Farm to Table, a non-profit organization in New Mexico, received \$142,382 through RCDG to partner with La-Montanita, a member-owned food hub, to develop and distribute a curriculum for best practices on food system cooperative development as well as to provide workshops throughout the state to assist cooperatives in different stages of development.

Farm to Table also partnered with the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union to develop models for using the cooperative structure to address three crucial challenges facing local food system development: meat processing infrastructure, food safety, and food storage/transportation.

Learn more: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/bcp_rcdq.html

Funding from the Farm Service Agency

Farm Loans

Summary: USDA provides loans to farmers and ranchers through local Farm Service Agency county offices, and also works with local banks to provide a government guarantee for farm loans made by those financial institutions to farmers and ranchers. The Agency targets a portion of its loan funds to minorities and women farmers and ranchers. Farmers and ranchers can explore FSA's Microloan Program for streamlined loans of up to \$35,000

Learn more: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=landing>

Farm Storage Facility Loans

Summary: Farm Storage Facility Loans finance the purchase, construction, or refurbishment of farm storage facilities. This program finances new cold storage buildings, which can be particularly important to those growing fruits and vegetables for the fresh market.

Learn more: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=prsu&topic=flp-fp>