

# Food System Literacy, Childhood and School-Age Children

## 2025 NEW HAMPSHIRE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STRATEGIC PLAN

**Purpose:** To provide a framework for the importance of the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and values, especially in growing and processing food, that allows young people to make informed decisions about food.

## What's at Stake?

The decline in knowledge of farming and food literacy negatively impacts people's health and farm viability, leading to a simultaneous increase in diet-related diseases and the loss of farmland. In New Hampshire, youth obesity has risen, despite strong food environment scores, and farming has steadily declined since 2012. A key solution to both issues is to enhance the food, nutrition, and agricultural literacy of early childhood and school-age children. Consistent education about food, nutrition, and agriculture can empower young people to make informed dietary and purchasing decisions to benefit their health and the health of our communities, now and as adults.

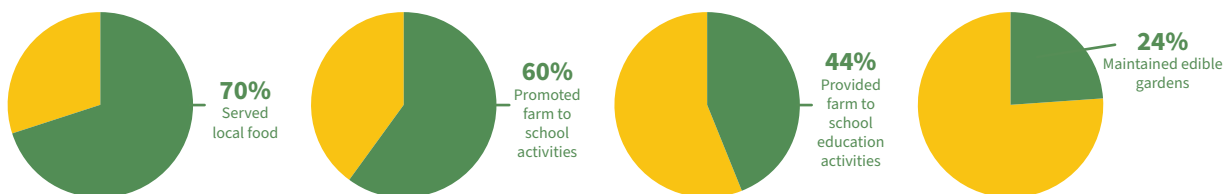
## Current Conditions

New Hampshire students lack consistent access to food, nutrition, and agricultural literacy programs. While state policy mandates systematic health education in grades K-12, including nutrition, it does not emphasize local food systems or farming. Although agricultural education is available for grades 10-12 through Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, these programs have limited participation and offer insufficient focus on the value of local food and farming. As a result, many students miss out on essential knowledge about nutrition, including dietary choices and agricultural systems that could enhance their understanding of health and well-being for themselves and their communities.

Students can learn food, nutrition, and agricultural literacy through various programs, including: Family and Consumer Science classes, UNH Extension's Nutrition Connections program (available in low-income elementary schools), Head Start programs, School to Farm days with NH Agriculture in the Classroom (NHAITC), and school gardens. Other options include participation in the NH Harvest of the Month program, high school agriculture programs, nonprofit offerings, and regional farm to school networks. Out-of-school opportunities include county fairs, 4-H programs, after-school activities, farm-based education, farm events, and farmers' markets.

### TRACKING FARM TO SCHOOL ACTIVITIES ACROSS NH, 2023

The 2023 USDA Farm to School Census reports that a total of **110** New Hampshire school food authorities—representing **453** schools and **165,013** students—participated in farm to school activities. Of that 110 school food authorities...



# Challenges and Opportunities

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## CHALLENGES

- Access to curriculum about food, nutrition, and agriculture is inconsistent and inequitable. Many students miss out on the connections to local food systems and the positive impact it can have on their health and the health of communities.
- High school CTE programs have dropped agriculture programs in favor of computer and technology programs.
- The NH Department of Education no longer has an Agriculture Education consultant.
- Local school boards decide what health and nutrition education is taught in each individual school or district, making it hard to track what students are learning.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- The Farm to Early Childcare Education Coalition is being established in New Hampshire and will increase food, nutrition, and agricultural literacy for Pre-K children.
- The Local Food for Local Schools Purchasing Incentive Pilot Program, which launched in the spring of 2025, is incentivizing New Hampshire school districts and food service directors to purchase New Hampshire grown and produced food for breakfast, lunch, and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program services.
- There are a variety of farm to school and agriculture in the classroom toolkits and resources available to educators that can be integrated into professional development and student programming.
- Regional farm to school networks can support educators in advancing or adopting farm to school practices and programs.

# Recommendations

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- **Develop a statewide farm to school grant program.** The grant program would increase funding for schools and organizations to support:
  - Gardening space, learning kitchens, and other relevant materials
  - The development of food system education, including nutrition, training, and resources for teachers and educators
  - Secondary education students participating in farm to school and food system curriculum, including extended learning opportunities (ELOs), internships, CTE courses, special classes in interdisciplinary curriculum, etc.
  - Hiring Americorps Vistas or Food Corps to serve as food literacy or farm to school coordinators inside a school system or in partnership with a school system or group of learners.
  - Creating a food system education theme for school cafeterias.
- **Pass a policy to support a permanent local food procurement reimbursement program for schools.** Pass a policy to support a permanent version of the Local Food for Local Schools Purchasing Incentive Pilot Program through the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food.

- **Promote and expand food system literacy in New Hampshire.** This can be effectively achieved by increasing the adoption of educational initiatives such as the NH Agriculture in the Classroom curriculum, the NH Harvest of the Month program, and the Indigenous NH Harvest program in both cafeterias and classrooms across the state.
- **Increase school and youth garden programming by providing support and resources for educators.** Increased school and youth garden programming in New Hampshire can provide opportunities to learn about growing food, eating and dietary choices, cooking, climate, food sovereignty and have other environmental and health benefits.
- **Research successful health and nutrition curriculum.** Perform research into successful health and nutrition curriculum that is being implemented in New Hampshire schools.

## Authors

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**New Hampshire**  
*Department of Agriculture,  
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This brief was developed through a participatory process led by the NH Food Alliance, a program of the University of New Hampshire. The brief content is comprised of the opinions, perspectives, and information gathered by the authors and participants, and does not necessarily represent those of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food or the NH Food Alliance.

For more information, including references and opportunities to get involved, visit the 2025 NH Food and Agriculture Strategic Plan web page on [nhfoodalliance.org](https://nhfoodalliance.org) or scan the QR code on the inside front cover of the print version.