

10 CENTS A MEAL PILOT: SUMMARY OF 2016–2017 EVALUATION SURVEY RESULTS

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For more information about the 10 Cents a Meal pilot, visit www.tencentsmichigan.org.

The Michigan Department of Education administered the 10 Cents a Meal pilot with support from partners at Networks Northwest; the Prosperity Region office in Region 2, which inputted and analyzed invoice data with the collaboration of the Grand Valley Metro Council in Prosperity Region 4; the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, which administered monthly FSD surveys and provided trainings; the Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, which conducted key stakeholder interviews; and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which assisted in FSD trainings and resources. Evaluation, training, and technical assistance contributions provided by CRFS to the 10 Cents a Meal pilot were funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

10 CENTS A MEAL PILOT: SUMMARY OF 2016–2017 EVALUATION SURVEY RESULTS

Ten Cents a Meal for School Kids and Farms is a pilot project that provides up to 10 cents per meal in match funding from the State of Michigan for participating schools to purchase and serve Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes to their students.

The goals of this competitive grant program are to improve daily nutrition and eating habits for children and to invest in Michigan agriculture and the related local food business economy. The 10 Cents concept, initially described in the Michigan Good Food Charter as one of the 25 agenda priorities, was first launched in October 2013 by the nonprofit Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities (then known as the Michigan Land Use Institute). This first pilot provided funds to school districts in three counties in Northwest Lower Michigan. In June 2016, the Michigan legislature funded a \$250,000 pilot project including 10 counties in Northwest Lower Michigan (Michigan Prosperity Region 2) and 13 counties in West Michigan (Prosperity Region 4). This pilot was administered by the Michigan Department of Education with some administrative funding support for tracking purchases provided to Networks Northwest, the designated Prosperity Region 2 office. The \$210,000 in match funding was designed to provide up to \$420,000 for Michigan's agricultural economy and healthy local foods for students.

Of the potential 167 school districts in the two Prosperity Regions, 52 applied to participate in the expanded pilot for the 2016–2017 school year. Because of funding limitations, only 16 districts (with a total enrollment of approximately 48,000 students) were selected to receive funds in this initial year. Applications were scored by a review team based on districts' capacity to purchase, market, and serve a variety of local foods and to provide related education activities. Total funding provided to each participating district was slightly less than 10 cents per meal because amounts were prorated to allow a larger number of districts and students to participate.

Per legislative requirements, food service directors (FSDs) at participating school districts were expected to submit invoices and receipts for Michigan-grown fruit, vegetable, and legume purchases (for tracking purposes) and to complete monthly evaluation surveys. These short electronic surveys averaged around 15 questions and were conducted by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (MSU CRFS). The surveys were sent to participating FSDs by the Michigan Department of Education and asked about the types of foods they purchased, activities they did to promote these foods and educate students about them, and their experiences with the program. Special expanded surveys were conducted in October (at the start of the program) to ask baseline questions about budgets, motivators, and barriers and in February (approximately halfway through the program) to ask about spending and outcomes of participating in the pilot.

In the first evaluation survey, FSDs were asked, "What motivates you to purchase and serve local foods in your food service program?" The survey offered a

list of potential motivations, and FSDs were asked to select their top three choices. (The full list of choices and results can be found in Table 1.) The most commonly marked motivations were “increase student consumption of fruits and vegetables”

and “higher quality food.” FSDs were also asked to choose their top three barriers to buying local food. The top picks were “lack of products available at certain times of year” and “budget constraints.” Top logistical challenges faced in serving local foods in

Table 1. Motivations, Barriers, and Logistical Challenges to Purchasing and Serving Local Foods (from Baseline October Survey)

What motivates you to purchase and serve local foods in your school food service program?	N = 16
Increase student consumption of fruits and vegetables	12
Higher quality food	10
Support the local economy	7
Access to fresher food	6
Help Michigan farms and businesses	4
Good public relations	4
Knowing food sources	2
Parent demand for local foods	2
Ability to purchase special varieties or types of produce and legumes	1
What barriers do you face in purchasing local foods for your school food service program?	
Lack of products available at certain times of the year	14
Budget constraints	9
Food safety concerns	5
Federal procurement regulations	4
Inconvenience	4
Lack of demand from student customers	2
Liability concerns	2
Other: Staff time/labor	2
Other: "No barriers, we live in a wonderfully agricultural area, and our school is very supportive of the local food movent."	1
What logistical challenges do you face in serving local foods in your school food service program?	
Lack of distribution method to get local foods to my building(s)	9
Lack of staff labor to prepare local foods	9
Lack of equipment to prepare local foods	6
Lack of storage	6
Lack of staff training to prepare local foods	4
Lack of facilities to handle fresh, whole foods	3
Lack of equipment to serve local foods	1
Other: "We have been preparing fresh food for a while, so these don't apply."	1

food service programs were “lack of a distribution method to get local foods to my building(s)” and “lack of staff labor to prepare local foods.” For all three of these questions, there was a large degree of consensus around the top two choices.

Midway through the school year, the expanded February survey asked some questions about initial outcomes of the program (see Table 2). Respondents indicated the strongest agreement with statements that, since the start of the pilot, they had offered more local vegetables in school meals; they had identified new Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes that were accepted by student customers; and they had offered more local fruits in school meals. The two statements with the lowest agreement were “We offered more local legumes (dry beans in any form) in school meals” and “Our students are eating more legumes.” Based on this, it may be helpful for pilot program administrators in future years to provide additional resources or support around sourcing and serving legumes. FSDs were also asked in February about outcomes the 10 Cents a Meal pilot had helped them achieve (see

Table 3). The two most frequently selected outcomes were “The variety of produce served in school meals has increased” and “We can plan local produce and legume purchasing with greater certainty.” Very few FSDs noted any change in school meal participation (2 out of 16) or levels of food waste (3 out of 16).

When asked about how food service staff responded to the pilot, FSDs overwhelmingly indicated that staff response had been very positive. One said, “The staff is always excited to try new things, and I think this goes a long way with the students, seeing the staff excited, and [students] are also more willing to try new things.” Another said, “[Staff members] love preparing local produce for the students. It feels good to give back to our local community.” Overall, 13 FSDs said their staff was excited about local food or had responded positively; two FSDs indicated that their staff did not pay attention to whether or not foods served are local.

When asked about how the pilot had helped them work with farmers, distributors, and other food suppliers, all participating FSDs described better

Table 2. Changes in Food Service Operations (as of February, Halfway Through the Pilot)

To what extent do you agree with the following statements for your food service operation since starting the 10 Cents a Meal pilot? (5-point Likert scale, <i>N</i> = 16)	AVERAGE	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
We offered more local vegetables in school meals.	1.50	8	8	0	0	0
I have identified new Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes that are accepted by our student customers.	1.56	8	7	1	0	0
We offered more local fruits in school meals.	1.63	7	8	1	0	0
Our students are eating more fruits.	1.81	4	11	1	0	0
The quality of our food offerings has improved.	1.81	4	11	1	0	0
Our students are eating more vegetables.	1.94	5	7	4	0	0
We offered more local legumes (dry beans in any form) in school meals.	2.31	4	5	5	2	0
Our students are eating more legumes.	2.63	2	4	8	2	0

Table 3. Outcomes (as of February, Halfway Through the Pilot)

Related to your food service operation, which of the following outcomes has the 10 Cents a Meal pilot helped you achieve, if any? Please select all that apply.	N = 16
The variety of produce served in school meals has increased.	13
We can plan local produce and legume purchasing with greater certainty.	12
Our purchasing power is enhanced.	9
Food vendors and farmers are more willing to supply to our food service program.	8
Challenges to purchasing local foods are reduced.	8
We have better support for school meals from the community.	8
Marketing menus is easier.	7
The cooking skills of food service staff have improved.	6
We are better able to meet school meal requirements.	5
Our food purchasing budget has increased.	5
Our food service budget is more stable.	4
Food waste has decreased.	3
Participation in school meals has increased.	2

connections with farmers and distributors and an increased ability to source locally. One said, “We have held lots of meetings with local farmers, learned about new farmers that could supply us with produce that we didn’t know before. It opened the door for us to be able to use more local farmers in school.” Another mentioned working with distributors: “We already had connections with farmers before the 10 Cents pilot, but I feel like my distributors started processing local items to suit the schools’ needs and wants. For example, diced carrots and diced potatoes.” Two FSDs specifically mentioned the increased buying power and ability to meet price points for local food through the pilot funding. Three other FSDs noted making arrangements with farmers about products and quantities they could use the following school year. One FSD responded, “Being involved with the 10 Cents pilot [has] given us greater buying power, and actually [farmers] have asked me how much product I am projecting for the next school year. This helps them know how much to plant.”

FSDs indicated that the overall response from parents and local communities was very positive, as seen in the following quotes from evaluation surveys:

- “Teachers and parents are pleased to see that we are featuring local produce.”
- “Everyone has been very positive. The community wants to see more local purchasing.”
- “Everyone seems to be in agreement that this is a worthwhile program for all involved.”
- “Everyone feels it’s a positive thing, especially the local parents and staff.”

On the expanded February survey, FSDs also had the chance to provide general feedback about the pilot and offer suggestions for improvement. Several FSDs commented that the late start of the pilot made it difficult to get started with local sourcing, as the peak season for local produce had passed before the program really got under way in October. This late start date was due to the short turnaround time between state budget approval and the beginning

of the school year. One FSD said, “The program started kind of late this year so we were scrambling to get things rolling. By the time we did, most of the local produce was not available (except apples). After meeting with several local suppliers (Michigan Farm to Freezer) items are starting to show that we can order now.” Five out of the 10 FSDs who offered feedback specifically mentioned that they valued increased funds for school food, in whatever amount was available, and urged that the program be continued. Other comments included a desire to be able to use funds for local dairy and protein, rather than only produce and legumes, and a suggestion that the program be renamed because “10 cents per meal is misleading” (the prorated funding meant that the amount of district spending on local fruits, vegetables, and legumes that could be matched by state funds was slightly less than 10 cents per meal).

On each monthly survey, FSDs were asked about which Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables, and legumes they tried for the first time in the previous month. Figure 1 shows the cumulative responses.

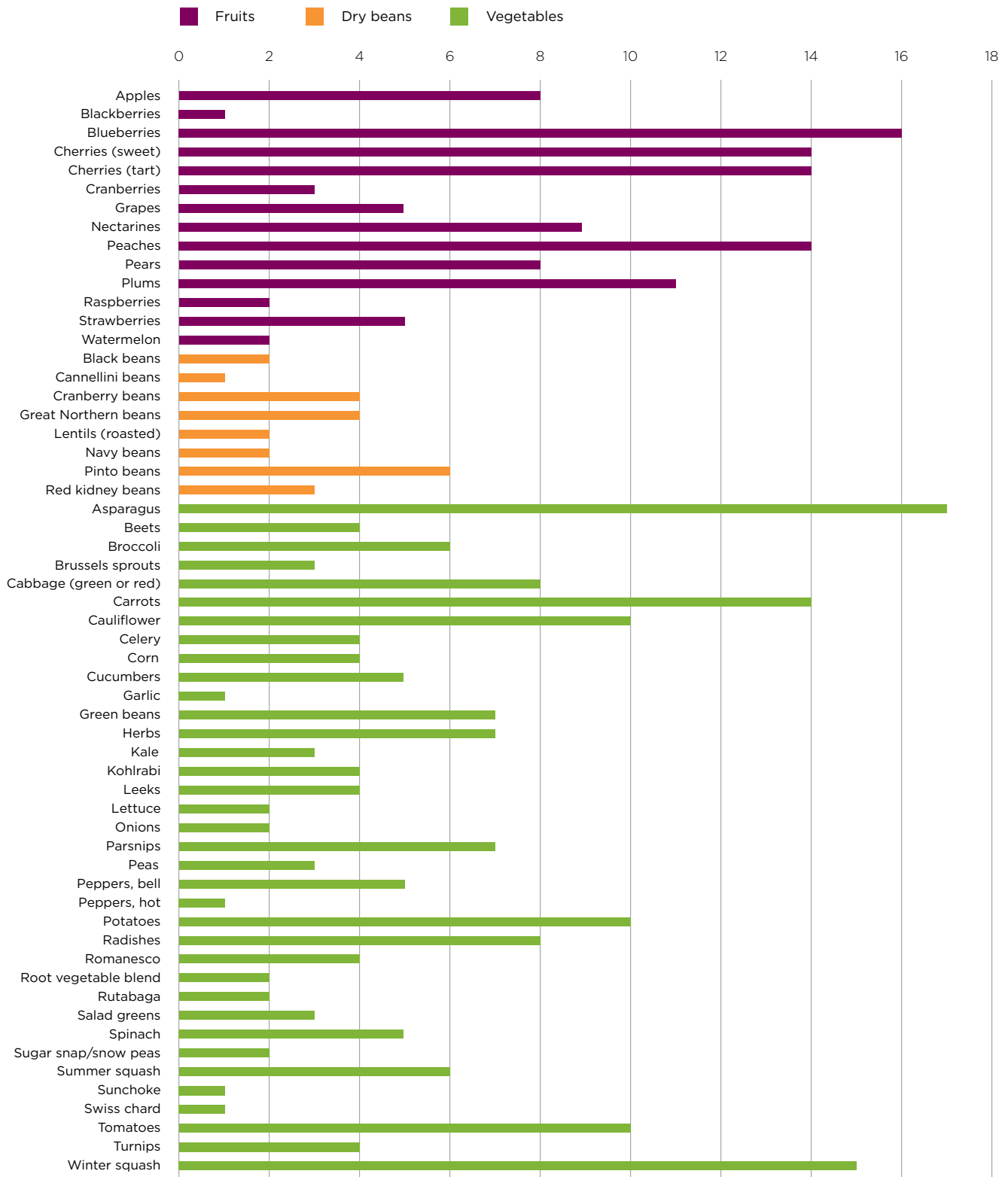
FSDs tried a wide variety of new Michigan-grown products; asparagus, winter squash, and blueberries were the most common, followed by carrots, peaches, and sweet and tart cherries. All of these top foods are among the products chosen as featured foods by Cultivate Michigan, the local purchasing campaign of the Michigan Farm to Institution Network (MFIN). This campaign was pointed out in program materials to participating districts as one potential source of menu ideas, sourcing information, and marketing materials.

Monthly surveys from November through May also asked FSDs which promotional or educational activities featuring local produce and legumes they had implemented in the preceding month (see Table 4) and which of these they felt were most successful (see Table 5). Tasting/taste-testing activities were by far the most common promotional and educational activities, cumulatively mentioned 39 times among the reported promotional activities and 43 times among the reported educational activities. Tasting/taste-testing activities were also the most



Photo credit: Jay Baker. Retrieved from: [flickr.com/photos/mdgovpics/6993520030/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/mdgovpics/6993520030/). Cropped from original.

Figure 1. New Michigan-Grown Foods Tried in the Preceding Month
 Combined responses from surveys from November through May



common response when FSDs were asked which promotional and educational activities implemented were most successful; they were identified 30 times as the most successful promotional activity and 32 times as the most successful educational activity. Nutrition education activities in the cafeteria and in the classroom were other commonly implemented educational activities, mentioned 29 and 27 times, respectively. Cultivate Michigan posters and window clings were the second and third most common promotional activities, with the use of posters reported 26 times and the use of window clings reported 24 times. However, when FSDs were asked what promotional activity had been least successful, window clings were the most common choice, with Cultivate Michigan clings and window clings in general selected a total of 18 times.

These survey results are useful to help improve the pilot program in the future, particularly in terms of technical assistance to FSDs and changes to evaluation and tracking. The survey results are not generalizable due to the small set of participating districts. Other limitations of this survey data include low response rates, a design error, and challenges with timing. First, evaluators had some difficulty with FSDs completing the monthly surveys. This may be because the program had a large number of reporting requirements specified in the legislation that established the program, including monthly evaluation surveys, and FSDs did not feel they had time to complete monthly surveys in addition to the other requirements. In response to a survey question asking for general feedback about the program, one FSD said, "Too much paperwork involved. Surveys

Table 4. Promotional and Educational Activities Implemented Throughout Pilot/School Year

In the past month, which promotional activities featuring local produce and legumes purchased through the pilot have you implemented in your food service program?	NOV (N = 9)	DEC (N = 15)	JAN (N = 19)	FEB (N = 8)	MAR (N = 14)	APR (N = 11)	MAY (N = 17)	TOTAL
Tasting/taste-testing activities	5	4	8	5	5	5	7	39
Cultivate MI posters	4	6	3	4	5	1	3	26
Cultivate MI window clings	4	5	2	3	5	2	3	24
Harvest of the Month menu feature	3	4	4	1	2	4	3	21
Promotional posters	2	3	4	1	3	2	1	16
Cultivate MI seasonal menu feature	3	3	2	2	2	0	4	16
Creative menu names for dishes featuring local foods	1	3	3	1	1	3	2	14
Message boards/electronic signage	3	3	2	0	2	1	1	12
Decorations	1	2	0	3	3	1	1	11
Window clings	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	7
Window clings/posters featuring MI farmers	1	3	0	0	1	0	2	7
<i>Did not do any promotional activities</i>	3	4	6	2	6	4	7	32
In the past month, which educational activities featuring local produce and legumes purchased throughout the pilot have you implemented in your food service program?	NOV (N = 9)	DEC (N = 15)	JAN (N = 19)	FEB (N = 8)	MAR (N = 14)	APR (N = 11)	MAY (N = 17)	TOTAL
Tasting/taste-testing activities	6	5	10	4	7	3	8	43
Nutrition education in the cafeteria	3	3	6	2	5	4	6	29
Nutrition education in the classroom	4	4	6	2	4	4	3	27
School garden activities	3	4	0	0	0	2	2	11
<i>Did not do any educational activities</i>	3	7	4	4	5	6	8	37

Table 5. Most and Least Successful Promotional and Educational Activities Implemented, Cumulative from Pilot Year

Promotional activities	Of the activities, which was the MOST successful?	Of the activities, which was the LEAST successful?
Tasting/taste-testing activities	30	—
Cultivate MI posters	3	4
Cultivate MI window clings	—	10
Harvest of the Month menu feature	6	4
Promotional posters	—	5
Cultivate MI seasonal menu feature	3	6
Creative menu names for dishes featuring local foods	6	4
Message boards/electronic signage	1	—
Decorations	2	1
Window clings	—	8
Window clings/posters featuring MI farmers	—	1
Other	5	—
None	—	5
Educational activities		
Tasting/taste-testing activities	32	5
Nutrition education in the cafeteria	10	13
Nutrition education in the classroom	5	7
School garden activities	4	7
None	—	5

could be condensed and combined to be more efficient. That being said, any additional money for local fruits and vegetables is very important.” In addition, the initial design of the surveys did not require FSDs to include the name of their district, so some initial survey results could not be matched up with a specific district. This made it difficult to track the responses of a single district over time and also meant it was not possible to tell which districts had not yet completed any given survey and follow up with those districts. Starting with the February regular and expanded surveys, this issue was fixed and district name was included as a required question. Finally, the original evaluation plan included an expanded June survey to learn final outcomes of and reactions to the program, but timing of this survey coinciding with the end of the school year meant the survey ultimately was

not sent out before the school year ended and some FSDs became unavailable for the summer.

In August 2017, the Michigan legislature approved expansion of this pilot program for the 2017–2018 school year to a third six-county region (Prosperity Region 9, in Southeast Michigan), with an increase in state funding to \$375,000. FSDs in districts that are selected to participate will continue to track their spending through the program and will be required to complete evaluation surveys. CRFS will be administering these surveys again in the coming year and will seek to make adjustments to the surveys to help reduce the burden of reporting and to improve response rates among the 32 school districts awarded pilot funds to participate.

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