

Local Food Program

HB-19-1132



Submitted to:

Education Committee, Rural Affairs and
Agriculture Committee, and Agriculture and
Natural Resources Committee

By: Rebecca Boone

December 2024



COLORADO
Department of Education

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Definitions	4
Introduction	5
CDE Staffing	6
Grant Implementation	7
Technical Assistance and Education Grant	9
Support to Program Sponsors	10
Collaboration with Producer Associations, Partners, and Farmer Organizations	11
Sponsor Demographics	12
Grant Outcomes	14
Dollar Amount Spent and Product Categories	14
Producers and Businesses	15
Names of Primary and Secondary Vendors:	17
State Map of Primary Vendors:	18
Economic Impact	19
Additional Sponsor Expenditures	20
Produce	22
Animal Proteins	22
Grains	23
Value-Added Processed Products	23
Program Evaluations	24
Conclusion	27
Accomplishments	27
Areas of Opportunity and Lessons Learned	28
Next Steps	29
Appendix	30
Farm to School and the Local Purchasing Landscape	30

School District
Operations Division
School Nutrition Unit
Office of Programs
201 E. Colfax Ave.,
Denver, CO 80203



Executive Summary

The Local Food Program (LFP) provides eligible sponsors (schools and school districts), with funding to purchase Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added products to use in Child Nutrition Programs. In the 2023-24 school year, 31 grantees spent program funds on allowable products and fulfilled the program requirements.

Thirty one sponsors received funding, totaling \$500,000. After a competitive application process, sponsors were awarded LFP funding based on a formula of \$0.05 per lunch served in the determining year. Basic grant activities included sponsors tracking purchased Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added processed products, along with the food cost, product type, quantity, vendor, farmer or producer and invoice date.

In addition to funding for child nutrition sponsors, the School Nutrition Unit at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) awarded Nourish Colorado with the Technical Assistance and Education Grant for the entirety of the program. This \$150,000 annual grant was awarded through a competitive process and provided relevant stakeholders with technical assistance and training. Participating sponsors indicated Nourish Colorado's work had a positive outcome on the LFP implementation.

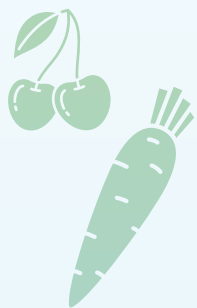
During the grant period, 87% of the purchases were for Colorado raw and minimally processed products and 13% of the LFP funding was used to procure value-added products such as tortillas and bread. The most purchased Colorado grown produce included peaches, apples, melons, lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers.

Sponsors also sourced Colorado raised or processed raw animal proteins such as beef, chicken, bison and pork. For the first time in the program, sponsors spent more funding on Colorado grown quinoa than any other grain product. They also procured value-added products such as tortillas, tamales and refried beans. A diverse range of locally grown, raised, processed and value-added products were bought using the LFP funding. Data highlights that sponsors put more emphasis into procuring raw and fresh foods, as opposed to value-added processed products such as baked items and pre-cooked meats. Compared to the first and second years of the program, sponsors have increased their ability to procure, prepare, and serve raw and minimally processed products, as is shown with their commitment to sourcing local foods beyond their LFP award amount.



Over 50% of sponsors reported spending additional funding on local foods, even after their funding for the LFP was exhausted. It is estimated that over \$2,216,000 was spent by the 31 sponsors on local products throughout the 2023-24 school year, despite the LFP award amount of only \$500,000. This shows a commitment by sponsors to increase meal quality while supporting the local economy. Utilizing an estimator tool created by Colorado economists, the total estimated impact of LFP funding on the Colorado economy is \$851,837.

Purchases were made with local producers, ranchers, food manufacturers, distributors and food hubs in the 2023-24 school year. Over \$130,000 (26%) of the LFP funding, was spent directly with a Colorado farmer, rancher, or producer and over the three year pilot period, sponsors have been able to increase their purchases with locally owned and operated businesses, which in return helps bolster the Colorado economy, residents, and communities.



Definitions

Child Nutrition Programs refers to any of the following federally funded meal programs eligible for the Local Food Program, including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program and Summer Food Service Program.

Sponsor means a school district, an individual charter school, Board of Cooperative Educational Services that operates a public school or Residential Child Care Institution that has been selected by the Colorado Department of Education's School Nutrition Unit to participate in the Local Food Program.

Colorado grown or raised products mean all fruits, vegetables, grains, meats and dairy products, except liquid milk, grown or raised in Colorado that meet the standards for the Colorado Proud designation.

Minimally processed products mean raw or frozen fabricated products that retain their inherent character, such as shredded carrots or diced onions and dried products such as beans. It does not include products that are heated, cooked or canned.

Value-added processed products mean products that are altered from their unprocessed or minimally processed state through preservation techniques, including cooking, baking or canning.

Participating Sponsor Grantee refers to a sponsor that received funds to participate in the Local Food Program.



Introduction

In May 2019, the Colorado Legislature passed House Bill 19-1132, The Local School Food Purchasing Program. Shortened in name to the Local Food Program, this pilot grant program offers eligible Child Nutrition Programs funding for the purchase of Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added products. The purpose of this grant program is to encourage child nutrition sponsors to procure local products, while in return fostering nutrition education, bolstering Farm to School activities across the state and supporting Colorado producers, ranchers and farmers. The Colorado Department of Education's School Nutrition Unit is responsible for administering the LFP, which is now entering its fourth year as an extension of the initial three year pilot. While the original legislation expired in January 2024, HB24-1390 extended the LFP for an additional year.

Participating sponsors may use the funding exclusively to purchase products that are Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added. The only restriction on funding is that value-added processed products may account for up to 25% of the awarded amount. This emphasizes the purchase of Colorado raw fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat and minimally processed products.

Per statute, sponsors are ineligible to participate in the pilot program if, in the prior year, more than 2,150,000 lunches were served. The criteria for a sponsor to be eligible to participate in the LFP included the following:

- A commitment to local purchasing or food and agricultural education.
- A kitchen with the ability to store, prepare and serve local food products.

Priority and additional scoring points were given to sponsors that:

- Had a district wide population with more than 25% of its students eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- Served fewer than 1,250,000 lunches in the determining school year.
- Successfully participated in the LFP in prior years.

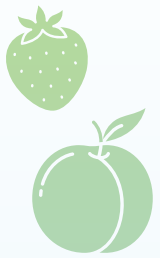
In March of 2023, School Nutrition worked with CDE's Office of Competitive Grants to release a Request for Applications for Child Nutrition Sponsors. Thirty one sponsors were selected through a competitive process to receive funding for the 2023-24 school year. Each sponsor that applied was awarded the funding. Grantees included eighteen returning sponsors from the prior years and thirteen sponsors new to the program. Award allocations were disseminated in sequential order, starting from the highest scoring application, until funding was depleted.

The legislature appropriated \$500,000 per year for the LFP pilot program to be distributed among selected sponsors and an exact total of \$498,841.50 was awarded across all applicants. The amount of funding is determined by multiplying the number of school lunches served in the prior year by \$0.05. The one-time grant payment accrues directly to the sponsor's nonprofit school food account, which can then be used for procurement of appropriate Colorado foods. Because of the set funding formula and the number of applicants, \$1,458.50 was not used from the LFP fund for this grant year.

CDE Staffing

HB-19-1132 included funding for 0.4 FTE for the program’s pilot year. School Nutrition designated one employee to oversee and manage the LFP, with approximately 40% of this employee’s payroll covered by the LFP during Fiscal Year 2023-2024. Responsibilities included releasing the competitive application, coordinating with other CDE units, providing program training and technical assistance, overseeing allowable expenditure tracking, oversight of the Technical Assistance and Education Grant and grant reporting and evaluation.





Grant Implementation

The required reporting by participating sponsors consists of tracking purchased Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added processed products, along with the food cost, product type, quantity, vendor, farmer or producer and invoice date. CDE's School Nutrition Unit developed a reporting tracker that was reviewed monthly. The food items purchased for the LFP were served in the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program and Summer Food Service Program.

Participating sponsors spent the entirety of the allocated funding for the 2023-24 school year. Hundreds of qualifying items were purchased for Child Nutrition Programs including Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added processed products.

Page 8 lists the thirty-one SY 2023-24 grant recipients and their allotted award amounts.



2023-24 Grant Recipients and Award Amounts

SY 23-24 Grantees	Award Amount
Bayfield School District 10JT-R	\$7,849.75
Boulder Valley School District RE-2	\$96,930.35
Calhan School District RJ-1	\$1,385.10
Campo School District RE-6	\$265.45
CSI- Colorado Early Colleges (ALL SITES)	\$6,483.35
CSI- Academy of Charter Schools	\$9,888.50
CSI- Community Leadership Academy, Victory Prep MS & HS	\$3,626.25
CSI- The Pinnacle Charter School	\$9,119.95
Durango School District 9-R	\$19,582.70
Englewood School District 1	\$11,309.75
Greeley-Evans School District 6	\$84,634.85
Gunnison Watershed School District RE-1J	\$6,094.6
Ignacio School District 11-JT	\$3,879.25
Lake County School District R-1	\$5,268.80
Mancos School District RE-6	\$2,083.50
Mapleton School District 1	\$32,030.05
North Conejos School District RE-1J	\$3,967.40
Pueblo City School District 60	\$64,882.35
Sangre de Cristo School District RE-22J	\$1,266.05
South Routt School District RE-3	\$1,474.35
Swink School District 33	\$1,405.80
Thompson School District R2-J	\$65,152.00
Vilas School District RE-5	\$467.10
Weld RE-4 - Windsor Charter Academy	\$7,523.25
Weld School District RE-4	\$24,019.50
West End School District RE-2	\$882.00
Centennial School District R-1	\$1,101.55
Roaring Fork RE-1	\$18,760.85
Las Animas School District RE-1	\$2,430.75
Salida School District R 32 J	\$4,675.75
Woodlin School District	\$400.60
TOTAL:	\$498,841.50



Technical Assistance and Education Grant

In addition to funding for child nutrition sponsors, the LFP also created the Local School Food Purchasing Technical Assistance and Education Grant. This portion of the LFP offers funding to a non-profit organization to promote the program and offer technical assistance to participating sponsors, Colorado producers, farmers and food aggregators. The selected non-profit organization receives \$150,000 each program year. Allowable use of the funding includes training, technical assistance and physical infrastructure to sponsors and partners, support the development and sustainability of local and regional food systems, offer chef and culinary training and/or help partners implement farm and food safety planning. The selected non-profit organization is awarded the Technical Assistance and Education grant for the entire pilot program.

Nourish Colorado was awarded the Technical Assistance and Education Grant for the entirety of the LFP pilot, starting in 2019. Nourish, formerly known as

Livewell Colorado, is a statewide non-profit founded in 2009 that focuses on “strengthening connections with and between farms, ranches and communities so that all Coloradans have equitable access to fresh, nutritious foods.”¹ Since 2010, the organization has worked to leverage the procurement power of schools and promote healthy food in institutions. Over the past three program years, Nourish has focused on providing targeted technical assistance to participating sponsors to support the success of the LFP. A large part of technical assistance is helping stakeholders find a shared, common language. “Technical assistance is the range of services and support to individuals, businesses, communities and organizations involved in institutional procurement of Colorado food and agricultural products. Assistance is intended to help them make informed decisions, adopt best practices, navigate regulatory requirements and improve their food and agricultural businesses’ overall operation.”²



¹ <https://nourishcolorado.org/about/>

² <https://cofoodsystemscouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CO-Farm-To-Loading-Dock-Report.pdf>

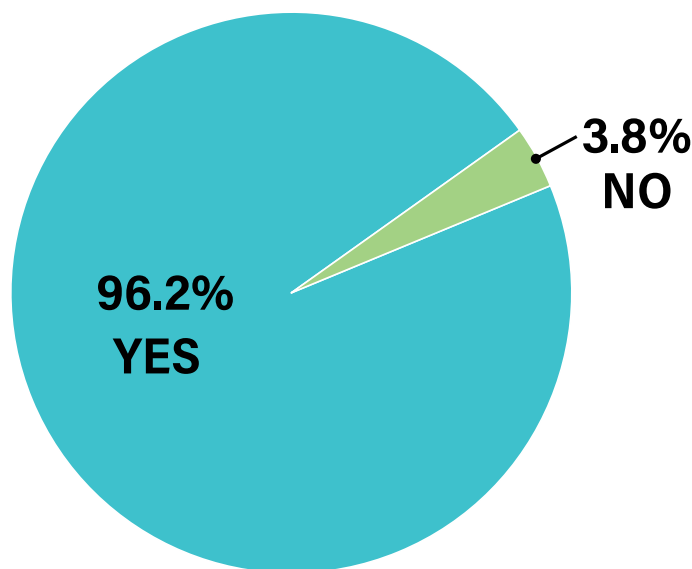
Support to Program Sponsors

In the 2023-24 school year, Nourish worked directly with all 31 grantees, a higher number of districts than the previous school year of 20 grantees. Through collaboration and in-depth interviews with the sponsors, Nourish crafted technical assistance plans, connected food service directors with producers and planned on-site visits with cafeteria staff. Nourish focused their efforts on the following projects:

- Conducted information gathering calls for all sponsors
- 74% of participating sponsors (23) received on site technical assistance or a customized workshop/training for staff
- Provided trainings on Colorado Proud School Meal Day, knife skills, vegetable cookery, recipe writing, food safety, etc.
- Provided recurring technical assistance calls for seven districts throughout the year
- Helped plan and facilitate the Cultivating Connections producer event with 50 people in attendance
- Using part of the \$150,000 awarded to Nourish, twelve grantees received an equipment grant in December 2023. Eleven providers were awarded \$1,392.86 and one provider was awarded \$4,178.58

During the evaluation process, 25 out of the 26 survey respondents said that the technical assistance provided by Nourish Colorado better helped them implement the LFP.

Did the technical assistance provided by *Nourish Colorado* help you better implement the LFP?



Collaboration with Producer Associations, Partners, and Farmer Organizations

Nourish's efforts also went to collaborating with and learning from experts within the food systems and farming communities. Nourish continued contracts with three consultants to strengthen relationships with school districts, food hubs and rural producers. These consultants attended monthly calls and worked closely with Nourish and CDE to identify the key challenges faced by producers and districts within Colorado's food system. Below is an overview of additional work Nourish focused on during the third year of the LFP.

- Continued contracts with three agricultural consultants (Ogallala Commons, KitchenSync Strategies and Farm Runners)
- Co-developed and led the Farm to Loading Dock gathering of 131 participants in Denver
- Developed and refined resources for the Local Food Program Guidebook, an online tool for school meal operators, agricultural producers and school and community members. Funding for the guidebook's development was separate from LFP funding
- Developed five sponsor LFP Success Story Videos in English and Spanish
- Developed and sent LFP promotional posters to sponsors



Taken as a screenshot from the main webpage for [Nourish Colorado's Local Food Program Guidebook](#).



Sponsor Demographics



The table below shows the sponsor demographics, including the total number of students enrolled at the district, the free and reduced-price percentage, the total number of meals served and their designation of either a rural or small rural district.

Sponsor or Site Name	SY 23-24 LFP Award Amount	District Enrollment	Free & Reduces Percentage	Meals Served in SY 23-24	Rural Designation
Bayfield School District 10JT-R	\$7,849.75	1,254	39.4%	92,166	Rural
Boulder Valley School District RE-2	\$96,930.35	28,362	25.5%	1,843,830	
Calhan School District RJ-1	\$1,385.10	436	56.0%	28,295	Small Rural
Campo School District RE-6	\$265.45	31	51.6%	3,248	Small Rural
Centennial School District R-1	\$1,101.55	187	93.6%	17,072	Small Rural
Colorado Early Colleges	\$6,486.35	6,150	32.8%*	124,505	
Academy of Charter Schools	9,888.50	1,874	34.6%	173,825	
Community Leadership Academy	\$3,626.25	315	87.9%	40,940	
The Pinnacle Charter School	\$9,119.95	1,909	81.9%	182,203	
Durango School District	\$19,582.70	5,267	39.7%	364,327	Rural
Englewood School District 1	\$11,309.75	2,368	66.6%	229,177	
Greeley-Evans School District 6	\$84,634.85	22,648	71.0%	2,037,535	
Gunnison Watershed School District RE-1J	\$6,094.60	2,066	33.4%	142,900	Rural
Ignacio School District 11-JT	\$3,879.25	691	58.0%	71,234	Small Rural
Lake County School District R-1	\$5,268.80	977	49.5%	82,955	Small Rural
Las Animas School District RE-1	\$2,430.75	956	81.9%	40,406	Small Rural
Mancos School District RE-6	\$2,083.50	521	53.9%	44,538	Small Rural
Mapleton School District 1	\$32,030.50	7,017	75.4%	665,194	

Table continues on next page.

Sponsor or Site Name	SY 23-24 LFP Award Amount	District Enrollment	Free & Reduces Percentage	Meals Served in SY 23-24 ▲	Rural Designation
North Conejos School District RE-1J	\$3,967.40	955	65.5%	79,624	Small Rural
Pueblo School District 60	\$64,882.00	14,549	83.4%	1,314,409	
Roaring Fork RE-1	\$18,760.85	5,846	50.9%	399,623	Rural
Salida School District R 32 J	\$4,675.75	1,326	34.1%	98,295	Rural
Sangre de Cristo school District RE-22J	\$1,266.05	277	65.7%	25,699	Small Rural
South Routt School District RE-3	\$1,474.35	341	24.9%	31,053	Small Rural
Swink School District 33	\$1,405.80	302	50.3%	27,643	Small Rural
Thompson School District R2-J	\$65,152.00	15,039	41.0%	1,292,568	
Vilas School District RE-5	\$467.10	361	30.5%	6,248	Small Rural
Weld School District RE-4	\$24,019.50	8,459	22.4%	511,629	
West End School District RE-2	\$882.00	256	58.2%	19,093	Small Rural
Windsor Charter Academy	\$7,523.25	1,560	13.9%	137,110	
Woodlin School District	\$400.60	76	52.6%	7,532	Small Rural
	Total Award Amount \$498,841.50	# of Students Impacted 132,376	Average F&R Percentage 53.10%	Total Meals Served 10,134,876	61% of Sponsors are Rural

*Average for multiple CEC sites

Per definitions set by the department's Field Services Unit, a district is determined to be rural by its size, its distance from the nearest large urban/urbanized area, and its student enrollment of 6,500 students or less. Small rural districts are those districts meeting these same criteria and having a student population of 1,000 or less.

▲ Not all meals included local foods



Grant Outcomes

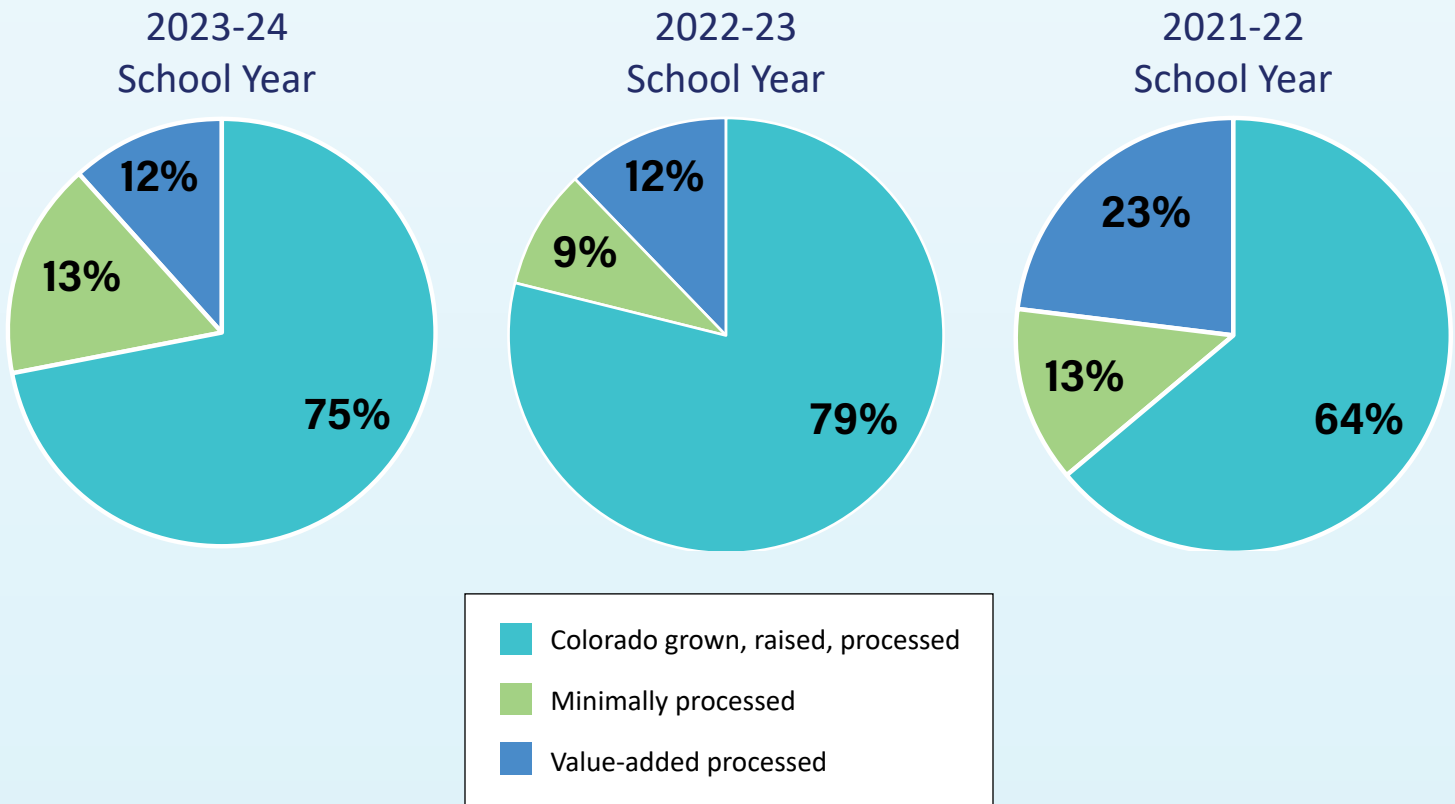
Dollar Amount Spent and Product Categories

Representing 132,376 students, the 31 sponsors that participated in the LFP used the funding to purchase a wide range of Colorado grown, raised, processed, and value-added products. The sponsors completed required trackers, developed by CDE, to collect data by invoice date, vendor, secondary sources (producer or farm), item/product, quantity, unit, food cost and product identification. Each sponsor shared online access to a spreadsheet, where the data input lived in real time.

Aggregated data from participating sponsors enabled School Nutrition to analyze trends and patterns in Colorado purchasing. The pie graph below displays expenditures by product category and shows a side-by-side comparison of the same graph from the 2022-23 school year and 2021-22 school year.

The two defined categories, minimally processed products and Colorado grown, raised and processed products, represent 88% of the funding spent in the 2023-24 school year. Sponsors were limited to a 25% funding cap for value-added processed products and total funding for this category was only 12%. This data highlights that sponsors put more emphasis into procuring raw and fresh foods, as opposed to value-added processed products such as baked items and pre-cooked meats. Compared to the first and second years of the program, sponsors have increased their ability to procure, prepare and serve raw and minimally processed products.

Purchases by Product Category



Producers and Businesses

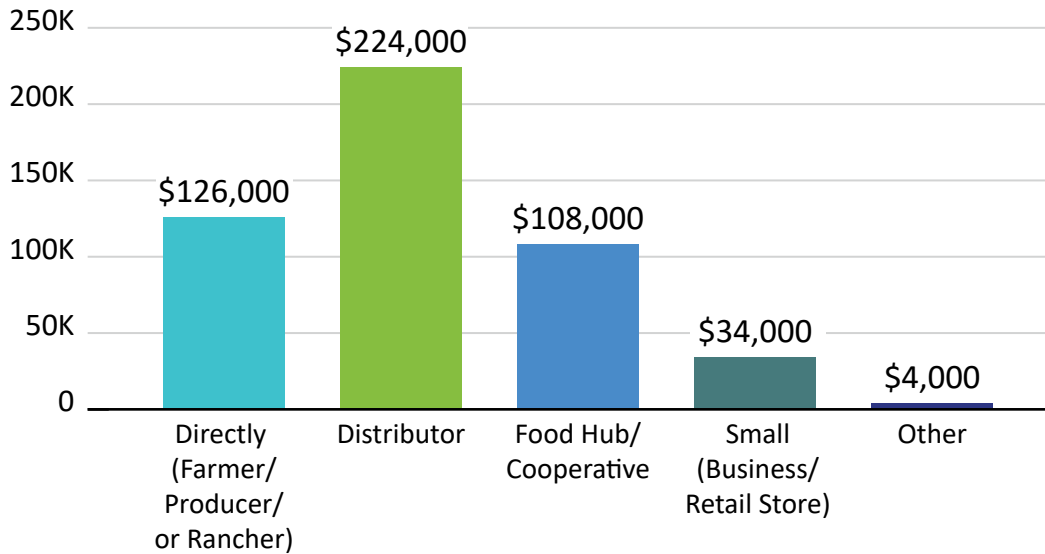
Sponsors purchased products from various vendors across the state, such as prime distributors, farmers, producers, manufacturers and food hubs. Sponsors that were purchasing from an intermediary source, such as a prime distributor or food hub, were asked to provide the secondary source if it was available to them. Several sponsors procured from a food hub as the primary source but were able to track the farm where the products were aggregated from as the secondary source. As defined by the USDA, a food hub is a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution and/or marketing of local/ regionally produced food products.”³

In total, sponsors tracked products from over 142 Colorado producers, farmers, ranchers, distributors, manufacturers and food aggregators as part of the LFP. Forty-five percent of the funding was spent by sponsors through their prime distributor such as US Foods or Colo Pac. Over \$130,000 (26%) of the LFP funding, was spent directly with a Colorado farmer, rancher or producer. Food hubs and cooperatives accounted for 22% of the funding spent and 7% of the funding was used at a small business or retail store. Below is a breakdown of the total expenditures by market type. The second chart below shows the dollar amount spent with the top ten vendors which are Colorado companies, food hubs or smaller family owned businesses. Colorado Native Foods is a local pork, poultry and beef processor. Colo-Pac and Front Range are statewide produce distributors that source Colorado products for sponsors when possible. Rogers Mesa Fruit and Hoffman Farms are smaller, family operated farms that sell fresh fruits and vegetables directly to sponsors. East Denver Food Hub and Farm Runners are food hubs that operate in the Denver metro region and Western Slope. This is a significant change from prior years when sponsors spent more funding with national corporate distributors. Over the three year pilot period, sponsors have been able to increase their purchases with locally owned and operated businesses, which in return helps bolster the Colorado economy, residents and communities.



³ <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2010/12/14/getting-scale-regional-food-hubs>

Total Spent with Each Vendor Type 2023-24 School Year



Total Spent with Top 10 Vendors 2023-24 School Year

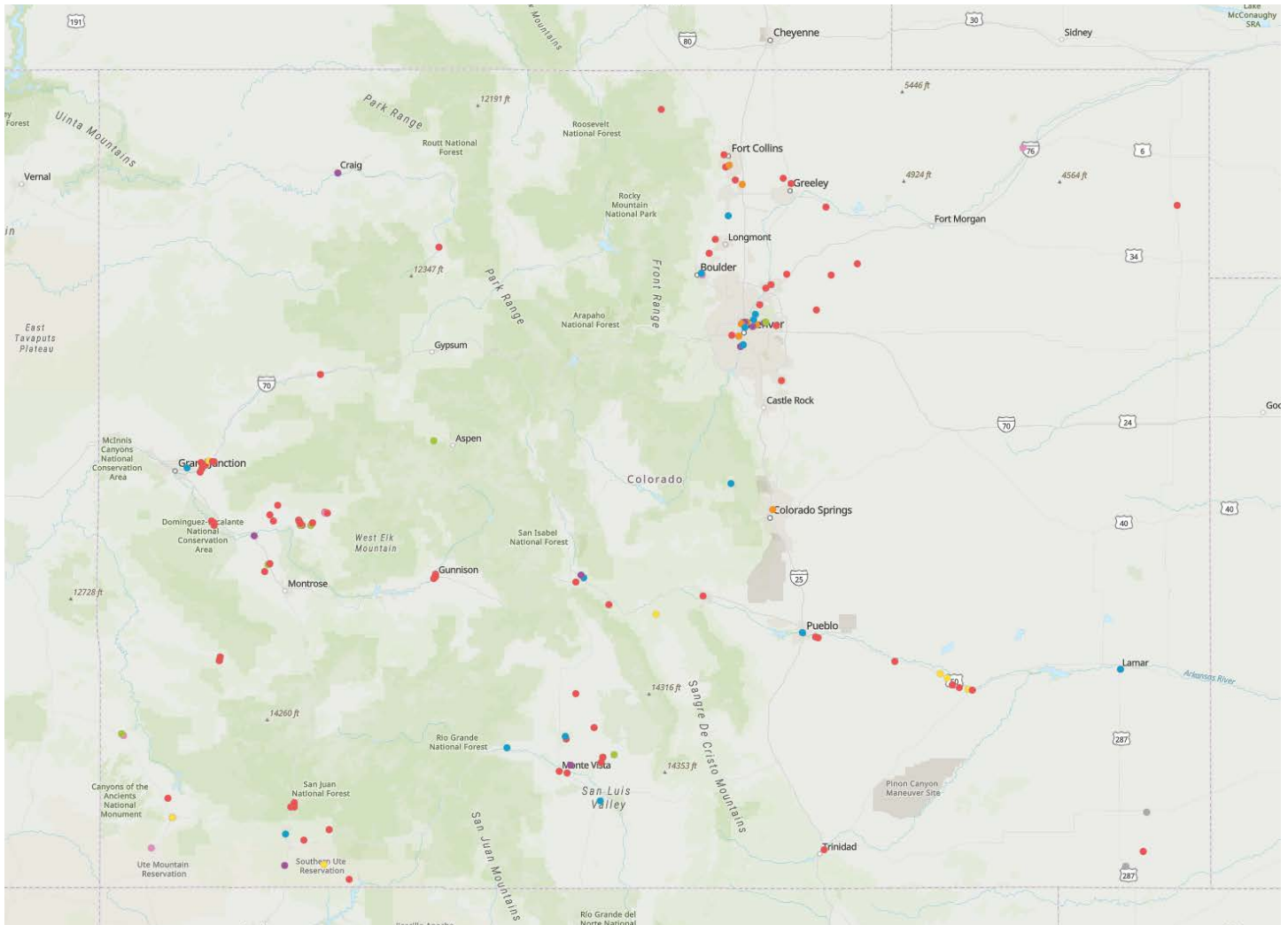
Vendor Name	Total Spent with Vendor
Colorado Native Foods	\$76,104.35
East Denver Food Hub	\$70,836.74
Hoffman Farms	\$48,452.00
Colo-Pac Produce	\$46,001.45
Front Range	\$41,250.00
Rogers Mesa Fruit Co	\$31,481.76
Farm Runners	\$16,934.97
Ranch Foods Direct	\$16,658.05
La Casita	\$14,100.00
Colorado Tortilla	\$13,261.45

Additionally, below is a list of *all* of the producers, ranchers, food manufacturers and businesses that were involved in the LFP. Some of these listed below were secondary sources, meaning the sponsor procured the products from a food hub or distributor. Fifty four primary sources were used to procure local products. There were 142 distinct Colorado owned businesses that benefited from the LFP and the map below shows the primary source location (this does not show the secondary source location).

Names of Primary and Secondary Vendors:

Abundant Life Organic Farms	Cortez Milling Co	Honey Rock Landing	Rez Meetz Urban Zesta Salsa
Adobe House Farm	Delicious orchards RSF	Hotchkiss Farm	Ring a Ding Farms
Adobe Milling Co	Delicious Orchards	Hungenberg Produce	Rogers Mesa Fruit Co
American Produce	Disanti Farms	Indian Ridge	Roots On the Range
Antelope Hill Orchards	Dominguez Canyon Fruit	Infinite Harvest	Sackett's
Aspen Moon Farm	Dry Storage Flour	James Ranch Beef	Scanga Meat Co
Aspen Produce	Dune View	JJT Beans	Shamrock
Austin Family Farms	East Denver Food Hub	Kalera	Snowden Meats
Barajas Dream Orchard	Ela Family Farms	Kerrigan Farms	Speedwell Farm
Barbara Ward	Emerald Gardens	Knapps Farm Market	Spring Born
Barber's Foods	Emerald Gardens	La Casita	Springside Cheese
Beet Street Farm	Epic Valley Salsa	La Milpa Tortilla Factory	Star Farms
Belafonte Farm	Farm Runners	Laz EWE 2 Bar Goat Dairy	Sunnyside Meats
Birdhouse	Farmers Fresh	Lenz Family Farms	Sunvae
Blue Moon Goddess	Fernandez Chile Co	Lone Pine Cattle Company	Sweet Cheeks Organic Peaches
Blue Range Ranch	Fields To Plate Produce	Lovejoy Family	Synder Boys Fruit
Bluebird Fruits	Fiesta Beans	Mattics Orchard	Tamales by Sarah
Bootheel 7 Ranch	Finch Ranch Artisan Meat	Milberger Farms	Taproot Cooperative
Bountiful Ridge Farm	First Fruits Organic Farms	Mountain Freshies	The Summer's House
Bow and Arrow	Fortunate Farms	Mountain King	Thistle Whistle Farms
C&R Farms	Four Wing Farm	New Roots Farm	Ticos
Calder Farm	Fresh Food Hub	Norwood Farm	Tierra Vida Farm
Campo School	Front Range	Olathe Producers COOP	Timeless Seeds
Cash-Wa	Fuller Orchards	On The Vine Farm	Topp Fruits
Castle Rock Meats	Gosar Natural Foods	Palisade Peach Shack	Tortilleria La Unica
Caviness Farms	Grady's Market	Palizzi Farms	True Leaf Microgreens
Centennial Cuts	Great Range Bison	Pastaficio	Tuxedo Corn Company
Clark Family Orchards	Guidestone Colorado	Paul Hinds	US Foods
Colo-Pac Produce	Gunnison Gardens	Petrocco Farms	Valley Roots Food Hub
Colorado Fresh Farms	Hanagan Farms	Phoenix Foods	Vilas School
Colorado Mills	Haven Orchards	Polidori Sausage	What A Yolk
Colorado Native Foods	Heartland Mills	Ranch Foods Direct	White Mountain Farm
Colorado Tortilla	Hirakata Farms	Rancho Durazno	White Rock Specialities
Conner Orchards	Hoffman Farms	Rancho Largo Cattle Co.	Williams Orchard
Cooksey Produce	Homestead Meats	Raquelitas	
	Homestead Orchard Farms	Redden's Fresh Eggs	

State Map of Primary Vendors:



- Direct (Farmer/Producer/Rancher)
- Food Manufacturer
- Food Hub/Cooperative
- Meat Processor
- Distributor
- Grocery/Farmstand
- Minimal Processor
- Other

Map Credit: Allison Armstrong, Graduate Research Assistant: CSU Dept. Agriculture & Resource Economics

Over the past three years, sponsor’s purchasing habits have evolved as the program became more streamlined and relationships between sponsors and sellers were maintained. In the pilot’s first year, there were 2,282 transactions recorded with over 150 vendors. In the second year, there were 1,043 transactions recorded with over 110 vendors and by the third year, 946 transactions with 54 vendors. This trend of fewer transactions,

vendors and direct purchases from producers reflects a more stable program, with sponsors increasingly utilizing food hubs and distributors to address delivery challenges. Food hubs play an integral role in helping sponsors procure the products needed. Both the geographic location and student enrollment size of sponsors influence the structure of the supply chain.

Economic Impact

In total, \$498,841.50 was used for the purchase of Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added processed products through the grant program. This award amount was utilized to calculate the “Total Impact Valuation,” which is the total economic activity associated with the LFP. By using the Local Food Systems Impact Calculator, a multiplier was added to the initial award amount and the value generated represents the upper limit of the economic benefit.⁴

The Local Food Systems Impact Calculator (LFSIC) is an online tool created by a team of economists at Colorado State University Extension in partnership with the USDA. The intent of the calculator is to support data collection and a science-based analysis of food systems programs and initiatives. The calculator factors together complex economic impacts and contributions within the supply chain and uses a common multiplier to determine the final valuation.

The calculator determined an *Impact Valuation for the LFP as:*

\$851,837.71

It is important to note that the LFSIC is not a precise measurement of impact, but rather a “rough estimate of the upper bound of economic impact that the LFP may have.”⁵



⁴ <https://calculator.localfoodeconomics.com/>

⁵ <https://calculator.localfoodeconomics.com/>

Additional Sponsor Expenditures

Sponsors were asked to provide estimated totals of local products purchased for the entirety of the 2023-24 school year, as well as estimated totals spent during the 2022-23 school year. There were several ways that sponsors procured local items beyond their LFP award amount. Some sponsors were able to tap into federal funding provided by the USDA to purchase local products, while other sponsors used general food service fund monies to continue to purchase local products. Below is a table that outlines the estimated totals reported by LFP awardees.

Sponsor/Site Name	SY 23-24 LFP Award Amount	Estimated SY23-24 Local Expenditures	Estimated SY22-23 Local Expenditures
Bayfield School District 10JT-R	\$7,849.75	not available	not available
Boulder Valley School District	\$96,930.35	\$1,000,000.00	\$800,000.00
Calhan School District	\$1,385.10	not available	not available
Campo School District	\$265.45	\$300.00	\$265.00
Colorado Early Colleges	\$6,483.35	\$55,000.00	\$16,700.00
Academy of Charter Schools	\$9,888.50	\$10,000.00	\$5,000.00
Community Leadership Academy & Victory Prep	\$3,626.25	\$10,000.00	\$6,000.00
The Pinnacle Charter School	\$9,119.95	\$9,119.00	\$8,000.00
Durango School District	\$19,582.70	\$125,000.00	\$100,000.00
Englewood School District	\$11,309.75	\$15,000.00	\$12,000.00
Greeley-Evans School District 6	\$84,634.85	\$461,042.00	\$222,889.00
Gunnison Watershed School District	\$6,094.60	\$12,000.00	not available
Ignacio School District	\$3,879.25	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00

Table continues on page 20

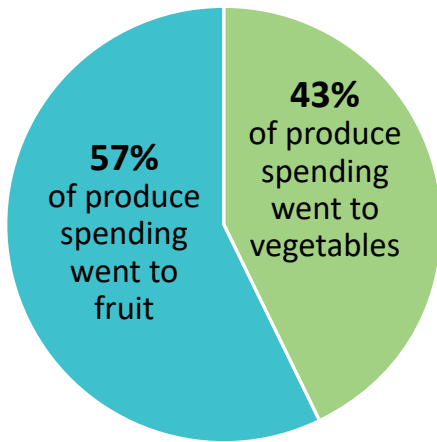
Sponsor/Site Name	SY 23-24 LFP Award Amount	Estimated SY23-24 Local Expenditures*	Estimated SY22-23 Local Expenditures
Lake County School District	\$5,268.80	\$39,000.00	\$21,000.00
Mancos School District	\$2,083.50	\$19,000.00	\$6,000.00
Mapleton School District	\$32,030.05	\$95,000.00	\$75,000.00
North Conejos School District	\$3,967.40	not available	not available
Pueblo City School District 60	\$64,882.35	\$162,863.00	\$25,351.00
Sangre de Cristo School District	\$1,266.05	\$1,300.00	not available
South Routt School District	\$1,474.35	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00
Swink School District	\$1,405.80	\$2,200.00	\$1,200.00
Thompson School District	\$65,152.00	\$89,500.00	\$46,500.00
Vilas School District	\$467.10	not available	not available
Windsor Charter Academy	\$7,523.25	\$38,000.00	\$2,000.00
Weld School District	\$24,019.50	\$24,019.00	\$0.00
West End School District	\$882.00	\$3,000.00	\$1,500.00
Centennial School District	\$1,101.55	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Roaring Fork	\$18,760.85	\$35,000.00	\$5,000.00
Las Animas School District	\$2,430.75	\$2,430.00	\$0.00
Salida School District	\$4,675.75	not available	not available
Woodlin School District	\$400.60	\$450.00	\$250.00
Total:	\$498,841.50	\$2,216,723.00	\$1,360,155.00

*includes award amount

From the data provided, it is evident that sponsors are committed to purchasing local products beyond the initial LFP award amount. Despite the small LFP funding amount of only \$498,841.50, approximately **\$2,216,723** was spent by 31 sponsors to procure local products during the 2023-24 school year. This was a significant increase in total local purchases reported from the 2022-23 school year, which was reported as \$1,360,155. Both of these figures include the LFP award amounts specific to the appropriate year. With the support of technical assistance, increased federal funding and strong producer relationships, sponsors have incorporated more local procurement into their values, mission, and school nutrition programs.

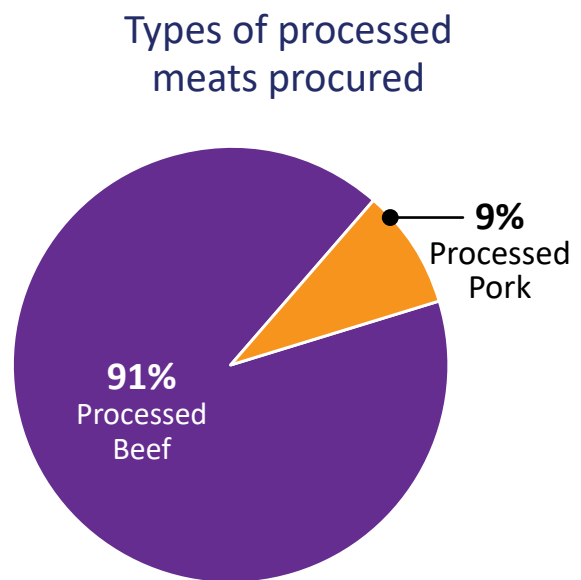
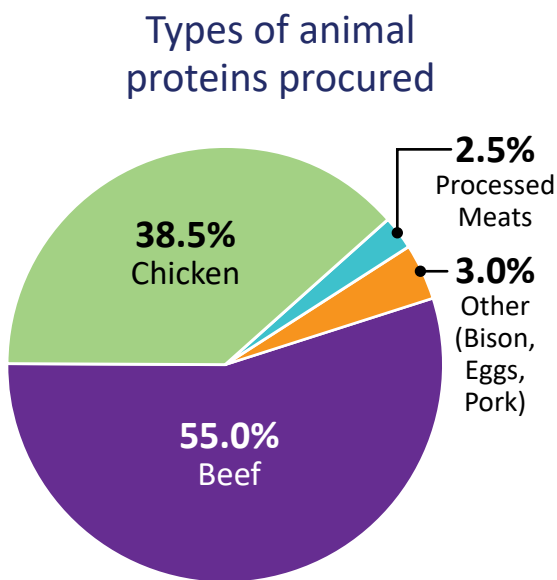
To further understand the economic impact of the LFP, the products purchased were broken down into specific product categories. Below are several infographics created by Nourish Colorado to highlight sponsor expenditures on produce, animal proteins, grains, and value added processed products.

Produce

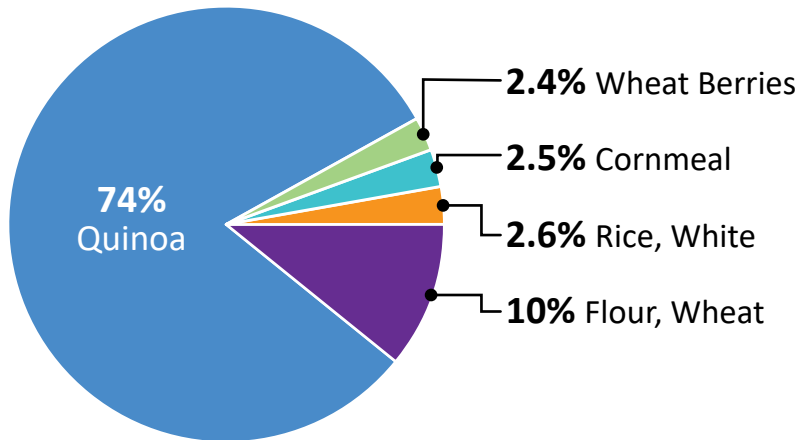


TOP 5 ITEMS	
FRUIT	VEGETABLES
1. Peaches	1. Lettuce/Salad Mix
2. Apples	2. Tomatoes
3. Melons	3. Cucumbers
4. Pears	4. Peppers
5. Plums	5. Celery

Animal Proteins



Grains



Value-Added Processed Products

1. Tortillas
2. Tamales
3. Refried Beans
4. Prepared Beef
5. Green Chili Sauce
6. Pasta
7. Soup
8. Salsa

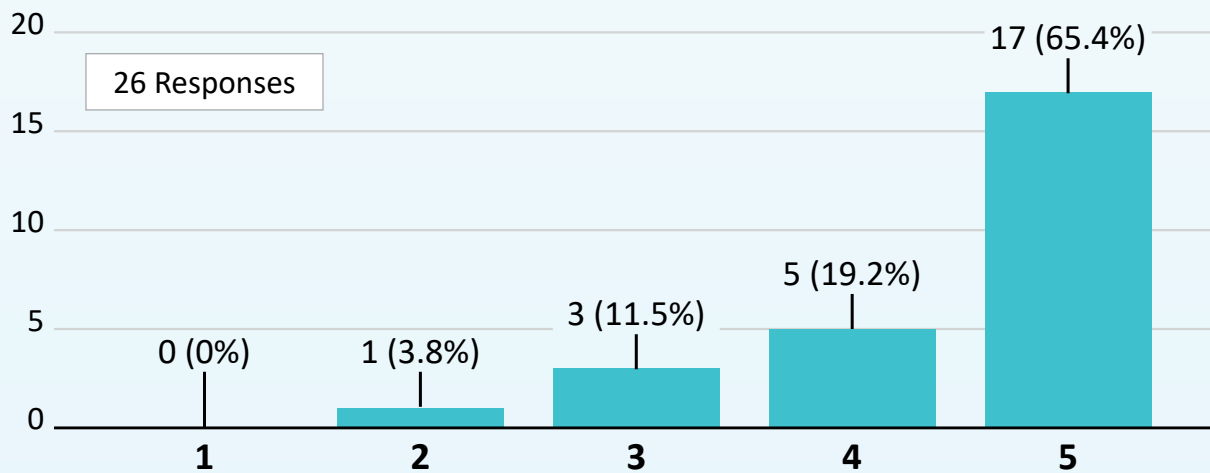




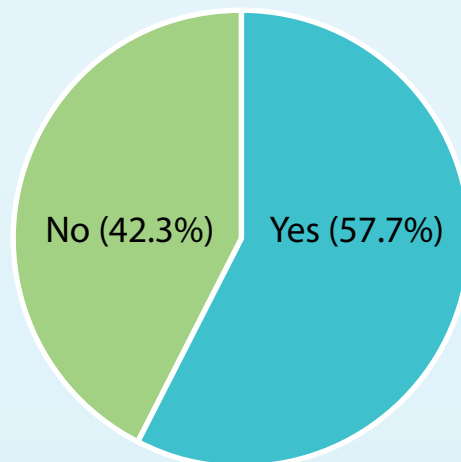
Program Evaluations

As per legislation, the School Nutrition Unit conducted qualitative surveys from sponsors and producers. School Nutrition disseminated these surveys in September 2024. Twenty-six out of the 31 participating sponsors responded to a set of 14 questions. With a high response rate from sponsors, the School Nutrition Unit aggregated prevalent successes and challenges from the LFP's third program year. Below are several graphs and charts that highlight sponsor answers to survey questions.

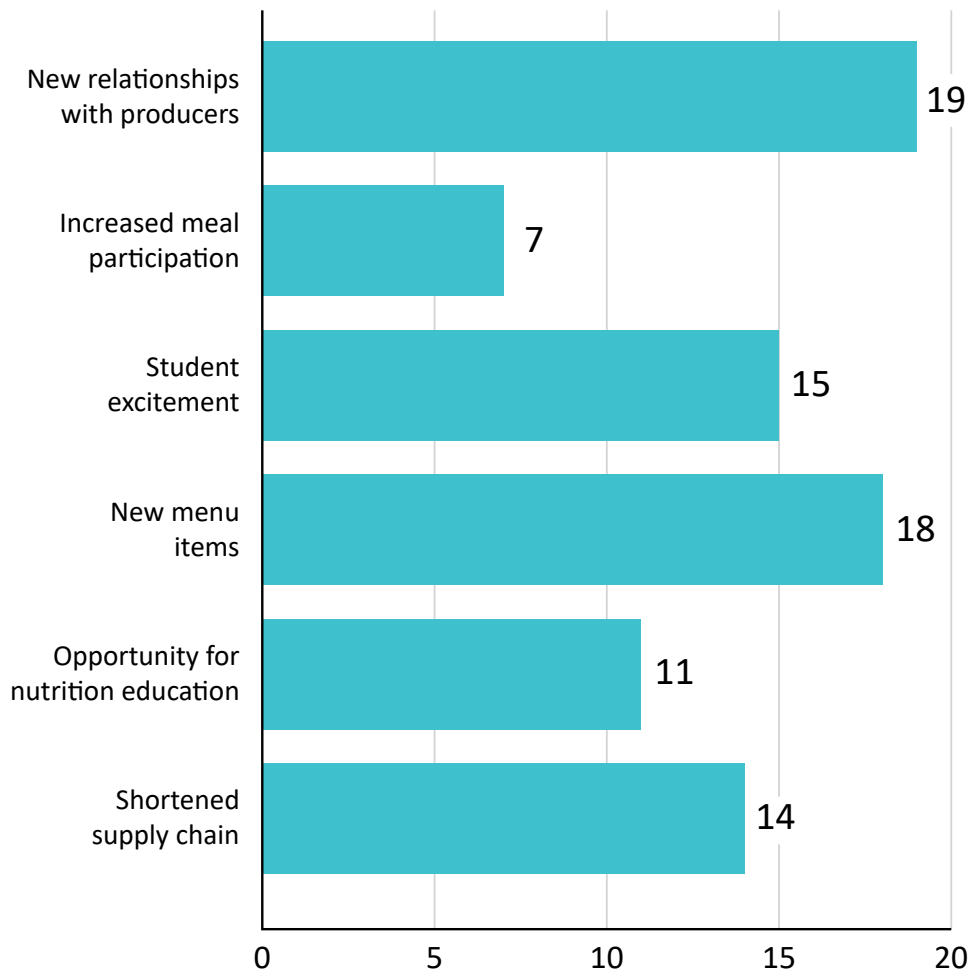
On a scale of 1-5 , how much did the LFP funding increase your ability to purchase Colorado products?
(1-did not increase, 3-somewhat increased, 5-highly increased)



Was the LFP funding the main reason you were able to purchase Colorado Products?



What were the biggest successes you had when procuring Colorado products? (select all that apply)



When identifying challenges to the LFP, 42% of respondents noted that product availability was one of the biggest barriers. 61% of respondents said that the high cost of local products was also a challenge. Delivery of local products was the next largest barrier to entry, with 23%. Only one respondent noted that they would not apply for the program in the future because it was too difficult for them to connect with Colorado producers and suppliers because of their location. The other 25 respondents said they would apply again because they are getting better

quality products and are “very grateful for the additional funding”. One respondent said that, “the administrative work was not burdensome compared to the awesome opportunity of purchasing local food. The equity in this mission is much more than just money we receive from the state.” Another sponsor said that the grant funding “helps us to fulfill our mission and value of feeding our students the freshest, most nutrient rich food possible while supporting our local farmers and economy.”

Respondents also had the ability to recommend changes to the program, and six specifically noted that continued and expanded funding for this program should be top priority. With the delay of the expanded LFP, sponsors are continuously seeking out additional funding streams, whether that is federal, state or private funding. Overwhelmingly, sponsors noted that the administration of the LFP was clear, adequate and an easy program to take advantage of. All 26 sponsors said that the tracking requirements were easy and not a burden.

School Nutrition and Nourish Colorado sent a survey out to farmers, ranchers, producers and distributors from whom sponsors purchased using LFP funding. School Nutrition had contact information for 93 producers, ranches and distributors and 21 responded. Respondents provided detailed insights into their challenges and successes. Key highlights from the producer survey include:

- Five respondents said that school districts were a new market for their business because of the LFP.
- Ten respondents said they sold to a new school district this program year.
- One business reported that 85% of their food sales were to Colorado school districts.
- 33% of respondents have a formal contract with a school district.
- 57% of respondents said schools informally procure from them when it is needed.
- One small business reported selling to over 9 school districts, accounting for over 50% of their total food sales.

Producers, distributors and food aggregators were also asked to explain their hurdles when working with school districts. Common themes included challenges with nutrition directors not being familiar with Colorado’s harvest times and product availability, pricing, differences in specifications like case size, and delivery. Six respondents said they did not experience any hurdles, and one noted that sponsors are “easy to work with.” Regardless of these challenges, 20 out of 21 respondents said they would continue to sell to schools in the future. Ten respondents also noted the technical assistance provided by Nourish Colorado helped their businesses learn how to sell to schools, understand the regulations with food safety, understand procurement and purchasing regulations and guidance on how to make new connections with sponsors.



Conclusion

Accomplishments

Each year, LFP administration allows for program growth and process improvement. School Nutrition updated the tracking tool used by sponsors. After analyzing data sets from three program years, the program manager and School Nutrition's data specialist identified unnecessary tasks and incorrect data fields. The third iteration of the LFP tracking

tool now includes automated and pre populated fields, resulting in more accurate and streamlined data that aligns with Colorado partners collecting similar information. This process led to a significant decrease in sponsors trying to track unallowable products, which is reflected in the cleanest data set from the program to date.

Over the past year, School Nutrition staff have presented on the LFP and its success during several state and national events focused on statewide incentive purchasing programs. Events included:

- CDE's Western Colorado Child Nutrition and Producer Gathering, November 2023
- Cultivating Connections, Greeley Evans school district, November 2023
- Colorado Dry Bean Committee Annual Meeting, December 2023
- Colorado State University's International Livestock Forum, January 2024
- Colorado's Fruit and Vegetable Grower's Association Annual Conference, February 2024
- Southwest Colorado Farm to School Meet & Greet, April 2024
- Colorado School Nutrition Association's Annual Conference, June 2024

Overall program successes and accomplishments included an increase in program participation and ease of spending by sponsors. Participating sponsors increased from 20 to 31 during the 2023-24 program year, which means that more sponsors are interested and willing to participate in the program year over

year. Varying sponsors with different demographics were successful in their implementation of the LFP, regardless of their size or location. It is a positive grant outcome that a diverse pilot of sponsors from around Colorado were successful in operating the program.

Areas of Opportunity and Lessons Learned

The third pilot year of the LFP proved to be successful, and sponsors were able to spend all of their allotted funding within the timeframe of the program. Each time the program is administered, CDE is able to improve program administration, increase technical assistance and engage in process improvement.

There were challenges identified during the 2023-24 program year, many of which surfaced because CDE was administering two local purchasing incentive programs simultaneously. With very similar names, some sponsors were confused on the distinct program requirements within the LFP and a federal program called Local Food for Schools (LFS). CDE staff took extra time to sort through data, make corrections and provide training on the differences in the programs.

Another area of opportunity is the ongoing need for assistance in connecting sponsors and producers. While Colorado is an agriculturally diverse state, the school food market is new to many producers. As the momentum of the program continues to build, the School Nutrition Unit will work diligently with other state agencies, such as the Colorado Department of

Agriculture, to bridge gaps and provide any needed technical assistance. This area of opportunity is being addressed through various regional workshops and a statewide Farm to School Roadmapping process. In 2023, CDE hired a full-time statewide Farm to School Coordinator using federal grant monies for this specific purpose. In collaboration with this employee, along with the LFP program manager and School Nutrition's Program and Operations Team, CDE is working to increase sponsor awareness around Farm to School incentives and programs.

One of the other lessons learned over the three-year LFP pilot program is that there is not a clear and complete data set of Colorado foods procured by sponsors across the state. To date, there is no collection of data on Colorado purchases from all child nutrition sponsors. While the School Nutrition Unit has taken steps to encourage sponsors to use a local purchasing code in their accounting records, it is not required that sponsors delineate or report these local purchases. The required trackers in the LFP, and LFS subsequently, are only a portion of the total data set of Farm to School expenditures across the state of Colorado.



Next Steps

House Bill 22-1414, Healthy Meals for All Public School Students (HSMA), was passed by voter approval of Proposition FF in the November 2022 election cycle. The HSMA program provides funding opportunities to Colorado public school food authorities participating in the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program via reimbursement for meals provided to students that would otherwise pay full price for a meal. Colorado is one of eight states across the nation offering a universal free meal program. With the passage of HSMA, the LFP was set to expand to a statewide, non-competitive program. During the first program year of HSMA, the state saw a significant increase in breakfast and lunch participation, which put unforeseen budget constraints on the program. The expanded LFP, which was set to start in the 2024-25 school year, would have provided any sponsor that opted in with increased funding to procure Colorado grown, raised, processed and value-added products. The funding amount was set to increase from \$0.05 to \$0.25 per lunch served in the previous school year. However, due to HSMA budget restraints, the statewide expanded LFP was put on hold in February 2024 and is now subject to available appropriations. The LFP pilot will continue for the 2024-25 school year.

The additional year of the pilot program allowed CDE to open up a Request for Applications to operate the LFP for the 2024-25 school year. In spring of 2024, CDE was able to award 32 sponsors a total of \$500,000. Below is a list of the awardees for the 2024-25 school year, which includes nine new sponsors. Details and outcomes from the final year of the LFP pilot will be provided in next year's annual report.



2024-25 School Year LFP Awardees

AWARDEES	AWARD AMOUNT
Mapleton 1	\$ 33,259.70
The Pinnacle Charter School	\$ 9,110.15
Englewood 1	\$ 11,458.85
Mancos Re-6	\$ 2,226.90
Campo RE-6	\$ 1,000.00
Durango 9-R	\$ 18,216.35
Colorado Early Colleges Fort Collins	\$ 2,627.70
Community Leadership Academy	\$ 2,047.00
Roaring Fork RE-1	\$ 19,981.15
Swink 33	\$ 1,382.15
Gunnison Watershed RE1J	\$ 7,145.00
North Conejos RE-1J	\$ 3,981.20
South Routt RE 3	\$ 1,552.65
Trinidad 1	\$ 4,230.30
Academy of Charter Schools	\$ 8,691.25
Calhan RJ-1	\$ 1,414.75
Montrose County RE-1J	\$ 24,148.75
Frenchman RE-3	\$ 1,072.45
Moffat County RE: No 1	\$ 7,066.00
Pueblo City 60	\$ 65,720.45
West End RE-2	\$ 1,000.00
Boulder Valley Re 2	\$ 92,191.50
Lamar Re-2	\$ 4,947.35
Thompson R2-J	\$ 64,628.40
Weld RE-4	\$ 25,581.45
Charter School Institute- The STEAD School	\$ 1,000.00
Creede School District	\$ 1,000.00
Eagle County RE 50	\$ 20,660.80
Vilas RE-5	\$ 1,000.00
Salida R-32	\$ 4,914.75
Windsor Charter Academy (School Food Authority)	\$ 6,855.50
Greeley 6	\$ 49,887.50



Appendix

Farm to School and the Local Purchasing Landscape

While this report is focused on the LFP pilot, understanding the Farm to School and Local Purchasing Landscape in Colorado can give additional context to similar efforts to increase local purchases within child nutrition programs. Due to increased federal and state funding specific to local procurement, the Farm to School landscape in Colorado continues to grow. The USDA's Office of Community Food Systems released the national Farm to School Census results in October 2024. This widely disseminated census is conducted every four years and allows for an in-depth understanding of Farm to School activities in each state. According to the 207 sponsor respondents in the Farm to School Census, 68% of sponsors in Colorado are already serving local foods in child nutrition programs, but local purchases are only 3% of total food costs. Over 47 respondents said that they currently have procurement policies in place that support the purchase of local foods, which means that approximately 30% of sponsors in Colorado are intentionally seeking out local food items.

In Colorado, 97 districts (62%) said they purchased local vegetables in the 2022-23 school year and 92 districts (59%) purchased local fruits as well. 37 districts (24%) reported purchasing local proteins during that same timeframe and 28 sponsors (18%) were purchasing a local grain item. Along with local procurement efforts, sponsors also reported on Farm to School activities such as edible gardens, nutrition and agricultural education, and marketing and promotion efforts.

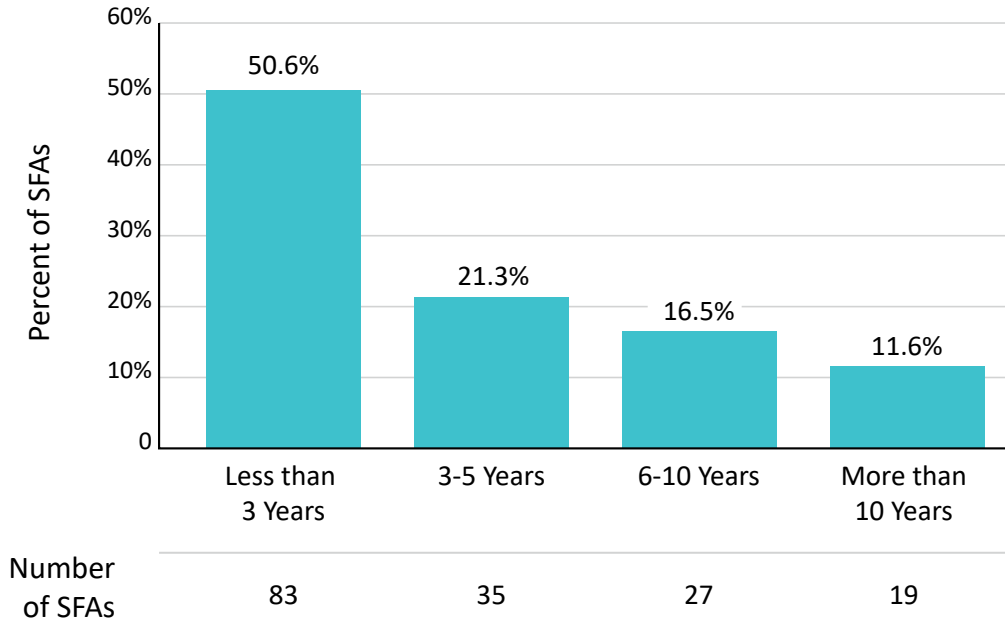
The USDA's census reports that 164 sponsors (79%) in the state of Colorado are participating in Farm to School in some manner. This translates to 1,832 individual schools and 894,480 students that have been impacted by these efforts.⁶ The length of participation has varied, but there has been a dramatic increase in Farm to School efforts over the past three years. The two infographics on the following page provided by the USDA capture the years of participation and impact of local procurement.



⁶ <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/census-results/census-data-explorer>

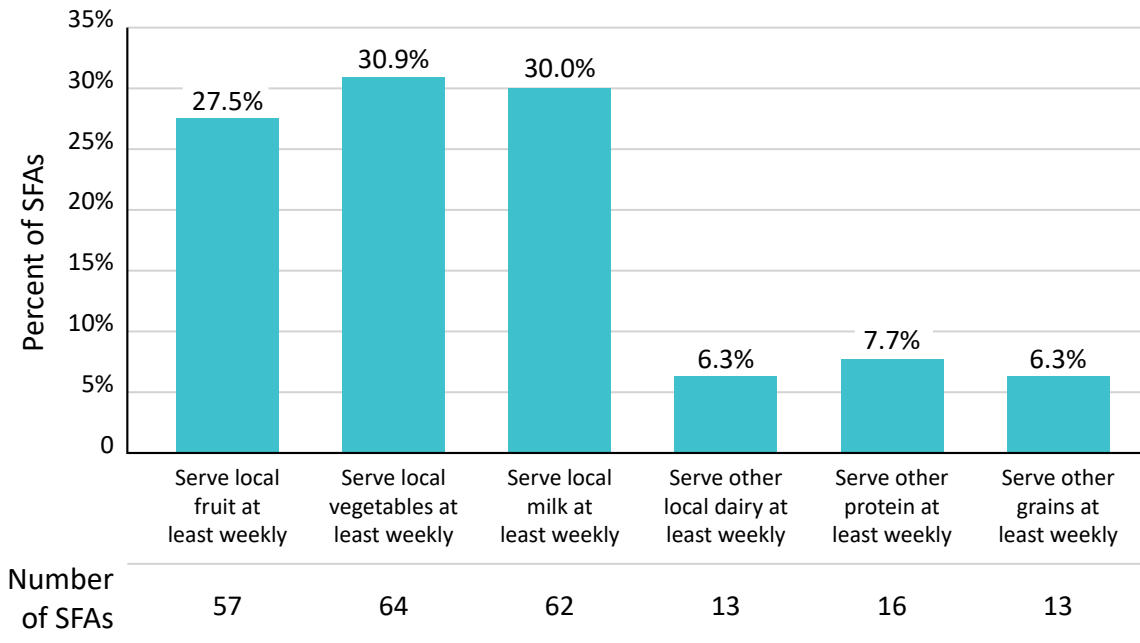
Length of Farm to School Participation by SFAs* in Colorado

*SFAs refers to School Food Authorities, which is a governing body that manages one or more school nutrition programs. Farm to school has been picking up momentum over the last 10 years. See how long SFAs in Colorado have been going local.



Local Foods Served Daily or Weekly

As farm to school has grown, so have the local options student enjoy at meal time. Many schools are serving fresh and local fruits, vegetables, dairy, proteins, or grains daily, a few times a week, or weekly.



Starting in April 2023, the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council (COFSAC), initiated the Farm to Loading Dock Landscape Assessment. COFSAC is a legislated committee whose purpose is to “grow local, regional, and statewide food economies” and to “provide community-informed, research-based policy recommendations to state leaders to address complex food systems challenges.”⁷ Since this time, the [Farm to](#)

[Loading Dock Assessment Report](#) was published in fall of 2024. The report collated data from several state and federal local purchasing incentives and details in great length seven gaps and potential strategies to help eliminate barriers to Farm to School and Farm to Institution efforts. The gaps and recommendations identified include:

GAP		RECOMMENDATIONS
1	Accessible, accurate, and detailed Colorado food purchasing data including price and source.	Establish shared metrics, create a centralized database, publish statewide market prices
2	Coordination and awareness of Colorado food and agricultural technical assistance offerings.	Create database of technical assistance providers, maintain a database of food delivery providers and routes
3	Support regional responsive and statewide connected value chain coordination.	Develop training with shared language of value chain coordination, establish clear communication between stakeholders, lean into established marketing tools
4	Producer and intermediary equipment to support institutional food production and distribution.	Flexible funding options intended for farm and ranch infrastructure and equipment
5	Food safety training and support.	Educate buyers on risk management and mitigation, explore opportunities for group food safety certifications, clearly communicate food safety certification requirements
6	Culinary capacity for cooking and prep required for scratch-cooking in institutional settings.	Invest in consistent and robust culinary and operational training, fund kitchen infrastructure and equipment to support scratch cooking, incentivize local food procurement for all taxpayer funded meal programs, develop resources for the promotion of local foods
7	Fruit and vegetable processing capacity.	Utilize existing local and regional processing facilities, create fund for co-packing spaces, share data on preferred processed products, educated processors about institutional food needs

⁷ <https://cofoodsystemsCouncil.org/what-we-do/>

Over the three program years, understanding the pricing or cost of unit items has been a challenge. While CDE required unit pricing the first year of the program, the data was inconsistent and was a barrier for sponsors to report on. COFSAC members that worked on the assessment report were able to collate pricing per unit based on the LFP past data. On the right is a table that shows the average, maximum and minimum pricing for the top products purchased with the LFP funding. With the robust work completed by COFSAC, and reported on in the Farm to Loading Dock, stakeholders can get a larger picture of the institutional food system in Colorado.

In understanding the larger Farm to School landscape in Colorado, it can be determined that sponsors overall are highly effective at utilizing state and federal funding to increase meal quality by procuring local foods to serve in Child Nutrition Programs. Continued funding from sources like the LFP helps strengthen relationships between local producers and distributors and offsets the cost of local products.

TABLE:
Individual product types
and price per
standardized unit

Product	n	Average	Max	Min
Apples	47	\$1.36	\$2.79	\$0.82
Beans	11	\$3.17	\$7.02	\$0.90
Beef	20	\$5.82	\$10.67	\$3.00
Beef Franks	9	\$4.03	\$4.95	\$3.89
Beef Patty	17	\$4.60	\$4.99	\$3.50
Beets	15	\$6.02	\$3.00	\$1.17
Bratwurst	3	\$6.02	\$6.07	\$5.99
Broccoli	8	\$3.71	\$4.00	\$3.00
Cabbage	23	\$1.73	\$3.00	\$0.34
Carrots	124	\$1.36	\$18.50	\$0.40
Cauliflower	7	\$3.71	\$5.00	\$3.00
Chicken	28	\$4.68	\$9.08	\$2.19
Cole Slaw	24	\$1.14	\$1.16	\$1.13
Cucumbers	26	\$1.62	\$3.04	\$0.70
Cured Beef	8	\$8.12	\$8.49	\$7.49
Ground Beef	31	\$4.38	\$6.68	\$3.29
Jalapeno	7	\$1.44	\$1.50	\$1.40
Kale	10	\$5.64	\$17.28	\$0.68
Melons	5	\$0.92	\$1.21	\$0.60
Microgreens	6	\$23.75	\$25.50	\$15.00
Onions	34	\$0.87	\$8.00	\$0.34
Peaches	23	\$1.67	\$4.00	\$1.15
Pears	21	\$1.26	\$1.40	\$1.00
Peppers	34	\$1.55	\$3.45	\$0.75
Pork	36	\$4.45	\$11.33	\$1.89
Potatoes	37	\$0.62	\$1.50	\$0.30
Radishes	12	\$4.72	\$26.67	\$2.00
Salad Mix	18	\$12.04	\$40.50	\$9.50
Sausage	8	\$5.53	\$5.98	\$4.19
Summer Squash	6	\$1.55	\$2.69	\$0.77
Tomatoes	43	\$2.80	\$6.00	\$0.87
Tortilla Chips	95	\$2.32	\$4.46	\$1.58
Winter Squash	11	\$3.42	\$11.75	\$1.69