



# Non-School Sponsor Participation

FINDINGS FROM THE 2024-2025  
10 CENTS A MEAL FOR MICHIGAN'S  
KIDS AND FARMS PROGRAM



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**MICHIGAN STATE**  
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# Acknowledgements

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Elena is a master's student in sustainable food systems at Arizona State University, and she joined Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS) as the 10 Cents a Meal Data and Evaluation intern from February 2026 to May 2026. She also works as the education and engagement coordinator at the MSU-Detroit Partnership for Food, Learning, and Innovation in Detroit, where she supports community orchard training, youth programming, and site stewardship. Previously, Elena served as a FoodCorps service member in Detroit and as the farm to school coordinator in Traverse City. In both roles, Elena was involved with 10 Cents a Meal and saw firsthand its power to impact children, farmers, and communities.

"I extend my sincere appreciation to May Tsupros and Colleen Matts of CRFS for their guidance and support throughout this project. I also thank Megan Maddox and Wendy Crowley from Michigan Department of Education for their thoughtful feedback and assistance with grantee data. Finally, I acknowledge the many individuals who contribute to the 10 Cents a Meal program behind the scenes, as well as the grantees whose efforts bring the program to life."

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We also wish to thank Emma Beauchamp and Mel Hill of CRFS for communications guidance, Jen Anderson at Clearing Blocks for copyediting services, Sarah Rypma for photography, and Mel Hill for design.

This work was conducted through funding support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Mosher, E. & Tsupros, M. (2026) *Non-School Sponsor Participation: Findings from the 2024-2025 10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms Program*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/non-school-sponsors-participating-in-10-cents-a-meal>

**10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids and Farms** (10 Cents a Meal) provides grant funds to pay for Michigan-grown food, local food transportation fees, and food service labor expenses to strengthen the local food supply chain and enrich nutrition and educational experiences for children. Eligible grantees from 2016-2025 include schools, early care and education centers, and other institutions that participate in Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) in Michigan. 10 Cents a Meal is administered by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) with support from its core partners: Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS), Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

# Introduction

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While the majority of 10 Cents Meal grantees are K-12 schools, grantees in 2024-2025 also included childcare and community feeding sites. Providers directly participating in USDA CNPs such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program or Summer Food Service Program may apply to 10 Cents a Meal independently. Organizations that participate in CNPs through a sponsor, such as family day care homes, participate in 10 Cents a Meal through their sponsoring organization. In the 2021–2022 school year, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) began a pilot program with the Association for Childhood Development (ACD), a family day care and childcare centers sponsor, to give these small childcare homes and centers the opportunity to participate in 10 Cents a Meal. As the sponsor, ACD facilitated communications, training on food purchasing and reporting, collection of purchase data, and distribution of surveys.

To understand program impact, CRFS evaluators surveyed all participating food program managers (FPMs) at grantee sites with MDE support. Electronic surveys were emailed to FPMs by MDE in November, April, and August of the 2024–2025 program year. Seventeen non-ACD childcare and community feeding programs responded to the November survey, 16 responded to the April survey, and 18 responded to the August survey. Of ACD-sponsored grantees, 143 providers completed the November survey, 33 completed the April survey, and 52 completed the August survey. Drawing on these survey results and purchase records, this report examines the unique experiences and perspectives of non-school grantees participating in 10 Cents a Meal as they serve the state's youngest eaters.



# Motivators and Benefits

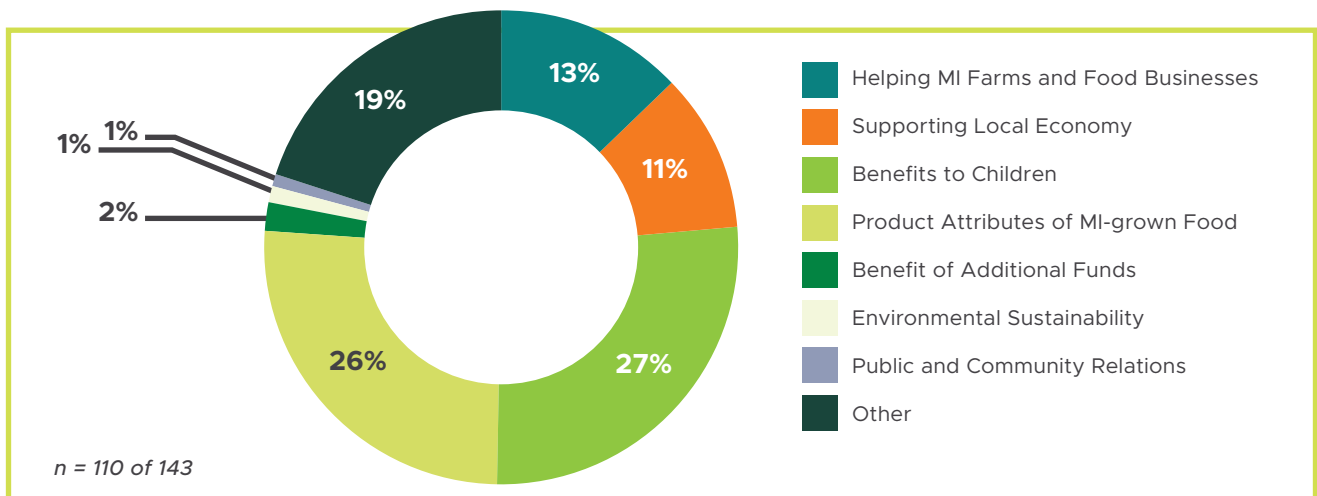
In the November survey, grantees were asked to describe the motivators, barriers, and logistical challenges involved in purchasing Michigan-grown foods. All three questions were open-ended.

## MOTIVATORS

One hundred ten ACD-sponsored grantees reported 264 different motivators for program participation. The top motivators ( $n = 110$  of 143) were:

- benefits to children (27%), including health, education, enjoyment, and exposure to new foods;
- product attributes of Michigan-grown foods (26%), including nutritional value, freshness, increased quality, and better taste;
- helping Michigan farms and food businesses (13%); and
- supporting the community and local economy (11%).

**Figure 1. Motivators: ACD-Sponsored Childcare Sites**

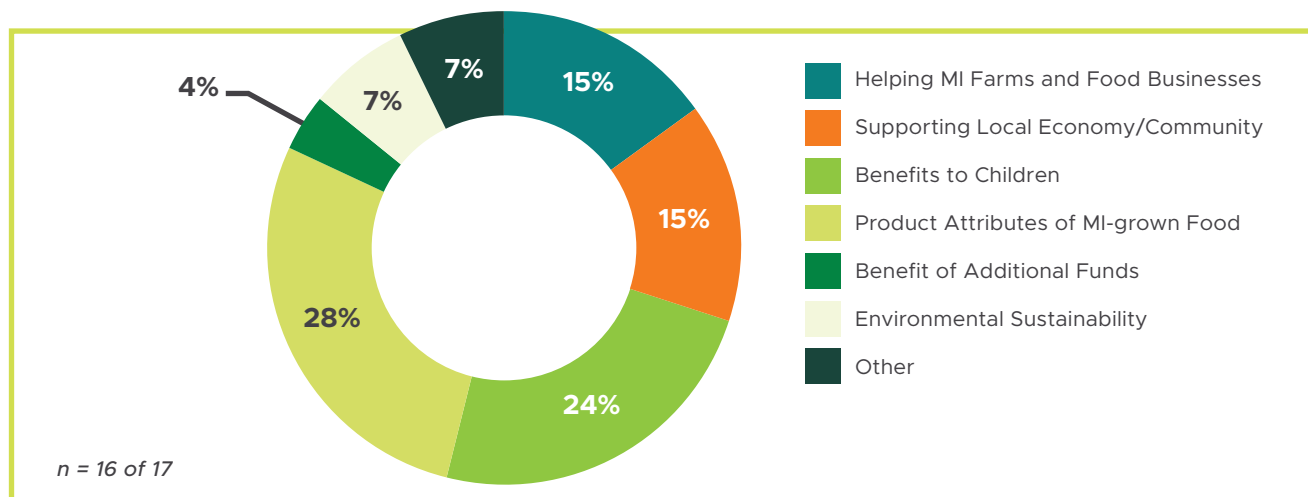


Seventeen ACD-sponsored respondents also reported being motivated to purchase foods that are organic or free of chemicals as well as foods that are minimally processed and do not contain preservatives or additives. This correlates with respondents' emphasis on health as a key motivator, with health accounting for 53% of answers in the "benefits to children" category.

Sixteen non-ACD childcare and community feeding grantees identified 46 different motivators for program participation. Their top motivators ( $n = 16$  of 17) were:

- product attributes (28%);
- benefits to children (24%);
- helping Michigan farms and food businesses (15%); and
- supporting the community and local economy (15%).

**Figure 2. Motivators: Non-ACD Childcare and Community Food Program Sites**



Similar to ACD-sponsored respondents, health was the top mentioned benefit to children, making up 53% of that category. In contrast, health was a motivator for only 21% of the benefits to children category for K–12 school grantees<sup>1</sup>. Overall, 34% of all childcare and community feeding site grantees mentioned health as a motivator, while only 12% of K–12 school grantees mentioned health as a motivator.

<sup>1</sup> K-12 survey and purchasing data was collated for 2024-25 school year and referenced throughout the report, but is not available publicly at the time of publication.

# Childcare Providers in Their Own Words: Motivations

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Instead of relying on a company, we appreciate the opportunity to know exactly where our food comes from and that it was prepared with the simplest, clean ingredients that are available.

—ACD-SPONSORED CHILDCARE PROVIDER

“

I love supporting local businesses in my area. Fresh foods taste better and are better for the kids. The kids tend to eat more and try new things when there is flavor from fresh food items.

—ACD-SPONSORED CHILDCARE PROVIDER

“

In the two years of serving children, we have noticed an increase in processed foods that have been offered to our children. We have been taking steps toward serving our children fresh fruits and vegetables to help them develop healthy eating habits.

—ACD-SPONSORED CHILDCARE PROVIDER

“

When we see children try new foods that they may not normally eat at home it is very rewarding.

—CHILDCARE PROVIDER

“

Purchasing and serving local foods to our childcare programs not only encourages health and nutrition benefits but also supports economic resilience. Supporting local farmers and their produce directly contributes to our local economy as well as strengthens local food networks, helping to improve food security for our neighborhood.

— CHILDCARE PROVIDER



# Barriers and Logistical Challenges

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Barriers were described in the survey as being “general and bigger picture obstacles that prevent or block your ability to purchase and serve local foods” while logistical challenges were described as challenges “specific to the operations of food service programs, including how they work with food vendors.” Although barriers and logistical challenges were asked as two separate questions, many respondents did not clearly differentiate between the two in their responses. As a result, the same theme and subtheme codes were used for analyzing responses to both questions. Although analysis is shown separately below, it is important to note that some grantees used the same answer for both questions. Adjusting these questions to avoid confusion and conflated responses in future surveys is an evaluation priority named in the [evaluation report for the 2023–2024 10 Cents a Meal program year](#).

## **BARRIERS AND LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES FOR ACD-SPONSORED GRANTEES**

One hundred twelve ACD-sponsored grantees responded to each of the questions, reporting 167 barriers and 140 logistical challenges (many responses included multiple barriers and/or logistical challenges and each one was coded separately). Twelve grantees (7%) reported no barriers, and 37 (26%) reported no logistical challenges.

The top barriers and logistical challenges ( $n = 112$  of 143) are listed below:

- **Issues related to food service operations accounted for 40% of reported barriers and 21% of logistical challenges.**
  - The higher cost of locally grown foods was the most frequently cited barrier within this category.
  - Respondents also noted limited staff time and reduced convenience, including the time required to identify and shop for local foods and the need to shop more often and at multiple locations.
- **The lack of product availability made up 27% of barriers and 26% of logistical challenges.**
  - The primary issue cited was Michigan’s short growing season and the limited availability of local produce during the winter months.
  - Additional availability concerns included inconsistent product quality, shorter shelf life, limited variety, lack of local options at grocery stores, and challenges for small centers in meeting vendors’ order minimums.
- **Access to local farmers and food suppliers accounted for 23% of reported barriers and 19% of logistical challenges.**
  - Respondents noted difficulty finding local farmers from whom to purchase Michigan-grown foods or other outlets that sell locally grown produce.

- Additional challenges included limited hours of operation at farmers markets and farm stands, the distance to local vendors, and transportation or delivery constraints when accessing local food outlets.

## BARRIERS AND LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES FOR NON-ACD GRANTEES

Sixteen non-ACD grantees responded to the barriers question, identifying 28 different barriers, and 15 responded to the logistical challenges question, reporting 19 different logistical challenges. Two grantees reported no barriers, and one reported no logistical challenges. The top barriers ( $n = 16$  of 17) and logistical challenges ( $n = 15$  of 17) are listed below:

- Issues related to food service operations represented 36% of barriers and 11% of logistical challenges. Cost and staff time were mentioned most often as barriers, and the need for convenience packaging and ready-to-serve options were identified in logistical challenges.
- Lack of product availability made up 29% of barriers and 26% of logistical challenges, including seasonality, variety, and quality issues.
- Access to local farmers and food suppliers represented 18% of barriers and 42% of logistical challenges, including difficulty finding local food vendors and delivery and transportation issues.

Overall, the barriers and logistical challenges of childcare and community food service grantees were similar to those shared by K–12 school grantees<sup>2</sup>, for which the cost of local foods, staff time, and seasonality were persistent challenges. However, the responses from childcare providers indicate that the way in which small childcare centers or home daycare providers are making local purchases differs from most K–12 schools. For example, most transportation-related barriers and challenges identified by K–12 school grantees in the 2024–2025 program year surveys described issues with delivery (or lack thereof), whereas personal transportation to local vendors and their limited hours of operation were more common challenges for childcare providers.

## LABOR AND TRANSPORTATION MOTIVATORS

During the 2024–2025 school year, all 10 Cents a Meal grantees could use up to 25% of their reimbursement grant funds to cover labor and transportation costs directly related to grant activities and goals, including delivery fees, mileage, and staff time for food preparation or recordkeeping. When asked if grant funds were used for labor and transportation during the 2024–2025 school year, most ACD-sponsored grantees (59%) reported that they did not use funds this way, and many were unaware that it was an option ( $n = 32$  of 52). Program purchase data shows that no labor and transportation expenses were submitted by ACD-sponsored grantees. On the other hand, eight of the 18 non-ACD childcare and community food service sites (44%) used labor and transportation funds according to survey responses ( $n = 18$  of 18). Six of the eight grantees that indicated using funds this way (75%) said that it expanded their ability to purchase and serve local foods eligible for 10 Cents a Meal.

<sup>2</sup> K-12 survey and purchasing data was collated for 2024-25 school year and referenced throughout the report, but is not available publicly at the time of publication.

# Program Impacts and Outcomes

Many ACD-sponsored grantees agreed that participating in 10 Cents a Meal had positive impacts on their programs and children. These FPMs reported ( $n = 32$  of 52):

- increased consumption of fruits (74%) and vegetables (53%) among their children;
- increased awareness of local fruits, vegetables, and dry beans among their children (72%); and
- increased offering of Michigan-grown fruits (71%) and vegetables (72%) in their programs.

Top reported outcomes of program participation for ACD-sponsored grantees ( $n = 32$  of 52) included:

- increased variety of produce served in food programs (50%);
- ability to plan local produce and legume purchasing with greater certainty (41%); and
- decreased food waste (38%).

Impacts for non-ACD childcare and community food service sites were similar. Grantees reported ( $n = 18$  of 18):

- increased fruit (57%) and vegetable (71%) consumption;
- increased quality of the fruits, vegetables, and dry beans served (71%);
- greater awareness of local fruits, vegetables, and dry beans among children (71%); and
- increased offering of Michigan-grown fruits (71%) and vegetables (64%).

Top reported outcomes of program participation for non-ACD childcare and community food service grantees ( $n = 18$  of 18) included:

- ability to plan local produce and legume purchasing with greater certainty (50%);
- increased variety of produce served in food programs (44%); and
- reduced challenges to purchasing Michigan-grown foods (44%).

## 69%

of food program managers at ACD-sponsored childcare sites and

## 94%

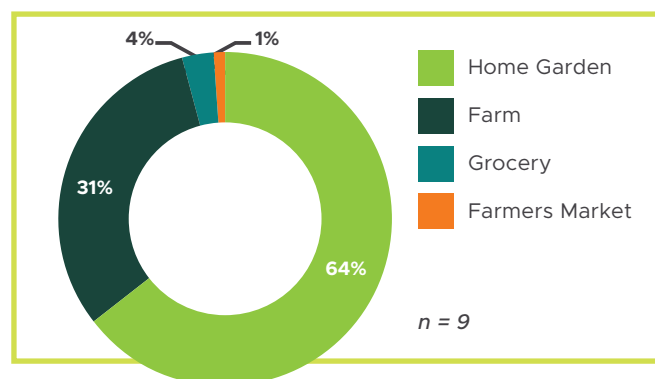
of non-ACD childcare/ community food sites said that **participating in 10 Cents a Meal allowed them to try new products** in their food service program that they otherwise would not have tried.

## IN THE GARDEN

Donated produce and produce grown in sponsors' gardens are allowable costs for 10 Cents a Meal grantees. **Produce from on-site gardens made up 22% of the value of all 10 Cents a Meal purchases by ACD-sponsored sites.** These items included berries, tomatoes, cucumbers, green beans, herbs, watermelon, and more.

To receive grant reimbursements, grantees report purchase information to MDE. Purchases from on-site gardens (64%) made up the majority of all purchases by ACD-sponsored childcare sites followed by purchases direct from farms (37%), grocery stores (3%), and farmers markets (1%). Because childcare homes or centers care for relatively small groups of children compared to most schools, incorporating garden-grown produce may be more practical, and the data indicate that many providers are taking advantage of this opportunity.

**Figure 3. ACD Purchases by Vendor Type**



Many ACD-sponsored grantees also used on-site garden activities to promote local foods (37%), compared to only 14% of K–12 sites. Half of all non-ACD childcare and community feeding sites also used on-site garden activities.

## Conclusion

These evaluation findings highlight the distinct perspectives of non-school sponsors participating in 10 Cents a Meal during the 2024-2025 program year. Although community food programs and childcare grantees share some motivations and challenges with K–12 schools, their experiences reveal considerations that are important for program administration, outreach, and technical assistance. Food program managers reported positive outcomes including increased fruit and vegetable consumption among children, greater variety in produce served, and the introduction of new items they otherwise would not have purchased. At the same time, they highlighted persistent challenges, such as limited staff capacity, difficulty sourcing local produce (particularly in winter), and obstacles in identifying and accessing local farmers or vendors.

Survey responses show that improving children’s health outcomes was one of the strongest drivers of program participation among FPMs at childcare sites, more so than among K–12 grantees. This finding highlights a key difference in participation motivators across settings and provides insight into the factors that may be most meaningful to childcare providers. Should opportunities for future childcare participation become available, emphasizing these benefits may help inform outreach and program design efforts. The use of produce grown in on-site gardens also emerged as a unique opportunity for childcare providers serving smaller numbers of children, indicating an area for further exploration. Insights from this evaluation contribute to a deeper understanding of the needs, priorities, capacities of childcare providers participating in 10 Cents a Meal and highlight potential opportunities for future program engagement with this sector.



## Center for Regional Food Systems

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

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