

Chapter 4

Farm-to-Institution Models

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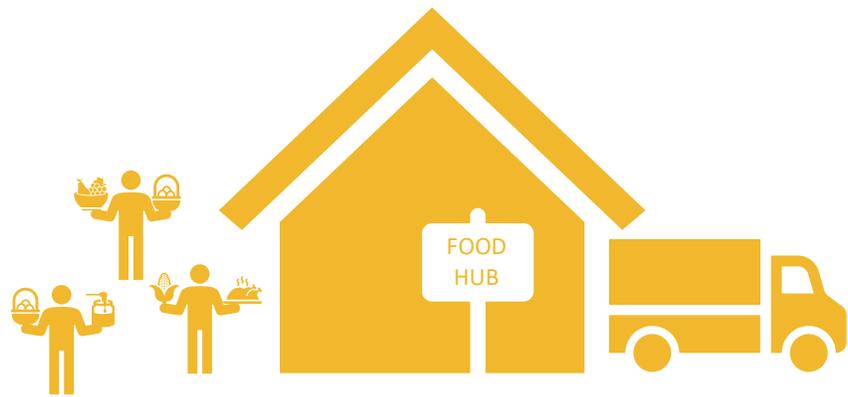
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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Government agencies, community organizations and the private sector have collaborated to create models meant to facilitate institutional use of farm-raised food. This chapter describes such models that have been implemented in other states and regions. Based on secondary research, these summaries indicate possibilities for Missouri to consider.

4.2 FOOD HUB

A nonprofit, *Farm Fresh Rhode Island* began as a student project before it formalized as a 501(c)3 in 2007. The organization leads multiple programs designed to help the Northeast U.S. satisfy half of its food needs through local production by 2060. Several notable initiatives connect the farm



community to institutional stakeholders (Farm Fresh Rhode Island).

First, the organization's *Market Mobile* program functions as a food hub. It aggregates food products grown and harvested on farms in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Originally, restaurants were the target audience. Since then, institutions such as hospitals and schools have purchased from Market Mobile (Farm Fresh Rhode Island). In 2020, the food hub introduced a direct-to-home option during the pandemic (Coelho 2021).

To participate in the program, growers must apply. Eligible producers must at a minimum prove that they have received all necessary licenses and purchased liability insurance. Farms must agree to have an annual inspection meant to verify that a particular farm raises the products it says it raises and adheres to quality control practices. Market Mobile also urges farms to have certifications such as GAP. The food hub largely handles produce, but growers also sell dairy products, eggs, meat, seafood and herbs. As of November 2021, the top three produce items sold for the year were mushrooms, apples and potatoes (Farm Fresh Rhode Island).

Farms choose the prices to charge for the products they list on the online ordering platform. Customers can access product from multiple growers in one spot, so they benefit from the food hub's centralized ordering and invoicing system. Farm Fresh Rhode Island levies an 18% fee on sales to support the food hub's infrastructure, operations and administration. Farms deliver their products to the Farm Fresh Rhode Island packhouse, and the food hub takes responsibility for storage and transportation from that point (Farm Fresh Rhode Island).

The food hub’s storage space has areas designated to hold products at varying temperatures. The packing and storage areas are part of a relatively new 60,000-square-foot facility located in Providence (Coelho 2021). At the three-acre site, Farm Fresh Rhode Island also hosts a year-round farmers market and houses a light processing space to convert local produce into value-added goods (McHugh 2020). Called *Harvest Kitchen*, the processing space trains 16- to 19-year-olds to work in culinary jobs (Farm Fresh Rhode Island). Additionally, food entrepreneurs can lease space at the facility needed to grow their businesses. For example, a coffee business had plans to roast coffee beans at the facility and sell retail product from the site (McHugh 2020). To do its work, Farm Fresh Rhode Island employs multiple workers and engages volunteers who participate in the Americorps and VISTA programs (Coelho 2021).

In addition to its food hub work, Farm Fresh Rhode Island’s *Farm to School and Community Education* program partners with the National Farm to School Network to educate Rhode Island residents about food. Farm-to-school programming includes cafeteria taste tests and after-school education. To further its farm-to-school efforts, Farm Fresh Rhode Island supports schools in procuring local food. Interested school food service representatives may engage Farm Fresh Rhode Island for resources such as purchasing assistance and food service-scaled recipes. With respect to its community education work, the organization provides educational experiences at venues such as senior centers and summer camps (Farm Fresh Rhode Island).

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4.3 LOCAL PROCUREMENT INITIATIVE

Created in 2010, the *Michigan Good Food Charter* included 25 priorities to help make accessing food from nearby farms as easy as procuring food elsewhere. A charter priority involved creating a local produce reimbursement program for schools. The concept focused on offering \$0.10 more per meal served, so schools could buy local produce (Colosanti et al. 2010).

10 Cents a Meal

The program reimburses schools \$0.10 for each served meal that contains select local ingredients. Funding has grown from \$250,000 in the first year to \$5 million in the latest budget.

Called “*10 Cents a Meal for Michigan’s Kids and Farmers*,” the program has administrative oversight from the Michigan Department of Education. K-12 schools, early childhood centers and youth residential care institutions may participate. “10 Cents a Meal” operates as a matching

grants program. Participants can use awarded funds to purchase minimally processed fruit, vegetables and dry bean products (Conners et al. 2021).



The program began as a pilot in northwest Michigan (Conners et al. 2021). At first, it used private funding before the state invested in the program (Heslip 2021). In 2016/17, the program received \$250,000 in state funding to reach 16 school districts and 48,000 students. For 2020/21, the state authorized expanding “10 Cents a Meal” to become a statewide effort and include early childhood centers as eligible participants.

The program would also have \$2 million in funding available (Conners et al. 2021). With the state funding and matching dollars combined, the program would at least generate a \$4 million investment into Michigan’s food system (Heslip 2021). An announcement released in January 2021 described that 138 schools, school districts and early childhood centers had received “10 Cents a Meal” grants to use during 2020/21, and the program would reach 406,000 children (Michigan Department of Education 2021).

In July 2021, the state’s latest school budget became law, and it allocated \$5 million for the 10 Cents a Meal program. Schools and child care providers have the opportunity to participate in the program (10 Cents a Meal for Michigan’s Kids and Farms).

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4.4 METRICS

The *National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative* has developed a process to gather and report standardized farm-to-institution metrics. The effort takes buy-in from institutions to record their food purchase activity. With those purchase records in hand, institutions can then evaluate their performance related to certain goals they may have set — for example, how much of their food should be procured from local vendors. Plus, they can better communicate about their local purchase behavior to stakeholders (National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative 2021).



A nationwide effort, the collaborative has more than 100 members from 30 states. Standardizing metrics collection and reporting means that purchase records from institutions throughout the country can be aggregated and used to present the collective impact of farm-to-institution activity. Additionally, because the collaborative engages stakeholders from throughout the country, it creates a community for sharing ideas and experiences. The collaborative hosts a quarterly call open to anyone interested in participating. It also maintains a listserv for sharing relevant information (National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative 2021).

To support institutions in reporting their purchase activity, the collaborative developed a tracking template and reporting calculator that institutions may use to organize purchase records anytime they buy food. The spreadsheet-based template asks institutions to note the

Six Farm-to-Institution Metrics Criteria

1. The *type of food product* purchased (e.g., produce, milk, eggs, meat and poultry)
2. The *type of business* supplying food (e.g., local independent farm, local food business)
3. Who *owns* the supplier's business (e.g., minority or woman owner)
4. The extent to which the supplier *sources ingredients locally*
5. Whether the food includes *identity-preserved ingredients*
6. The *market channel* used to buy food (e.g., direct from farm, food hub, co-op, distributor)

purchase date and cost. Additionally, they should include details about the six criteria listed in the gold box (National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative 2021).

After institutions enter their purchase data, the spreadsheet autogenerates summaries of purchase activity (National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative 2021). Note, rather than imposing a certain definition for “local” purchases, institutions may self-define what they consider “local” when reporting local purchases. In some cases, reporting on all of these criteria may present a challenge if the institutions themselves don't completely manage all transactions. For example, when purchasing from a distributor, a given institution may not know all information about the

farm that originally supplied the food ingredients. Thus, institutions may need to work with those intermediaries to collect the appropriate information (Brewer et al. 2020).

The collaborative developed the purchasing metrics criteria during a pilot project that received USDA Agricultural Marketing Service funding (Brewer et al 2020). The one-year cooperative agreement for this work, which began in 2019, listed the University of Kentucky Research Foundation and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service as parties (Brislen and O'Hara 2020). Since then, several groups have piloted the metrics. They include the Greater Cincinnati Food Policy Council, Northwest Food Hub Network, Farm to Institution New England and the Food Connection at the University of Kentucky (National Farm to Institution Metrics Collaborative 2021). The collaborative welcomed feedback about the metrics, so they could make improvements (Brislen and O'Hara 2020).

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4.5 MULTISTATE COLLABORATION

When *Farm to Institution New England* (FINE) formed in 2011, it had a goal to find how to work on farm-to-institution efforts in the Northeast across state lines. The organization's work would center on six states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont (Richman, Allison and Leighton 2019).

The organization began when regional farm-to-school programs, six New England agricultural commissioners, nongovernmental organizations and funders had a desire to partner. New England states have a shared culture, and many producers and distributors in the region already worked across state lines. FINE could contribute to the "New England Food Vision," a plan articulated by Food Solutions New England to improve regional food system development. The

plan sets a goal for the region to produce at least 50% of the food it needs by 2060. It has imported about 90% of the food it consumes (Richman, Allison and Leighton 2019).

Related to the food vision goal, FINE focuses on directing more regionally produced food through institutions, such as K-12 schools, colleges and healthcare facilities (Richman, Allison and Leighton 2019). For these institutions, FINE focuses on educating them and helping to make the local food buying process go as smoothly as possible (Henry P. Kendall Foundation 2020).

Farm to Institution New England

Since 2011, Farm to Institution New England has implemented plans and programs to help K-12 schools, colleges and healthcare facilities use more regionally produced food.

In an effort to reach its goal and give stakeholders a chance to connect and share ideas, FINE hosts events such as conferences, webinars and workshops, and it produces materials including case studies and newsletters. Through its work, it engages farm-to-institution stakeholders such as government agencies, institutions, farms, food distributors, food processors and foodservice operators (Farm to Institution New England 2021).



FINE has some work focused on special interest areas. For example, to support farm-to-college efforts, the *Farm and Sea to Campus Network* formed in 2015. The network states that its mission involves creating a community that supports supply chain transparency and on-campus food system education. It provides an opportunity for stakeholders to connect and collaborate (Farm to Institution New England 2021).

Funding agencies that have supported FINE include the American Farmland Trust, USDA, John Merck Fund and Henry P. Kendall Foundation. The initial budget in 2011 totaled \$500,000. TSNE MissionWorks, a nonprofit, has also provided financial support to FINE (Richman, Allison and Leighton 2019).

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4.6 PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

Montana Food and Agriculture Development Network centers have assisted businesses focused on innovating and commercializing food, agricultural and renewable energy products (Mission West Community Development Partners 2020). The state’s department of agriculture has a role in operating the network’s four centers (Montana Department of Agriculture).

Located in western Montana, *the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center* (MMFEC) functions as a food processing-focused research and development facility. Affiliated with Mission West Community Development Partners, the center processes local foods into value-added goods. It undergoes inspections from the USDA, FDA and the Montana Department of Agriculture Organic Program (Mission West Community Development Partners 2021). The center makes value-added fresh and frozen produce, branded products and protein alternatives. Some products processed at the facility appear on institutions’ menus (Mission West Community Development Partners 2020).



The center promotes products such as breakfast bars and tomato-based sauce. More than 90% of the breakfast bars’ ingredients originate from Montana farms. The bars are available in three flavors: apple, apple-cherry and cherry. The Montana ’Mato Sauce blends canned tomatoes with Montana-raised carrots, butternut squash, leeks, onions and garlic. MMFEC also produces protein alternatives. Made from all Montana-raised ingredients, the beef-lentil crumble represents one of the center’s alternative protein products. Its potential uses include soups, sauces, tacos and nachos (Mission West Community Development Partners 2021). The center

developed the crumble after it recognized a need for supplying Montana beef into local schools at a price that would align with school budget constraints. A 2015 report from the Wallace Center at Winrock International, Common Market and Changing Tastes — and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation — shared that the beef-lentil crumble had been adopted by three school districts (The Wallace Center at Winrock International, The Common Market, Changing Tastes and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2015).

MMFEC sources raw ingredients from local farmers, including *Western Montana Growers Cooperative* members (Mission West Community Development Partners 2020). In 2002, the co-op began as a grant-funded effort initiated by the Lake County Community Development Corporation (The Wallace Center at Winrock International, The Common Market, Changing Tastes and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2015). The co-op and MMFEC started their partnership through a pilot program. The pilot effort enabled the organizations to process five types of fruit and vegetable seconds, and the finished products were added to school meals (Henn et al. 2020).

The farmer-owned Western Montana Growers Cooperative supplies buyers such as grocery stores, restaurants and institutions. It serves institutions such as schools, summer camps, hospitals and senior living communities. Members — the co-op’s website lists nearly 40 farms — produce fruit, vegetables, milk, cheese, lentils, eggs, honey, meat and value-added goods. They benefit from the co-op’s wholesale marketing and delivery services. Using refrigerated trucks, the co-op picks up produce from members’ farms and transports the food to its warehouse for packing and storage. It ships food to buyers on the following day. The co-op also has a sales team that works on its members’ behalf (Western Montana Growers Cooperative).

One of the co-op’s institutional buyers — the University of Montana — has explored how it might collaborate with the co-op and a food processing facility on equipment investments that would lead to incorporating more local food into its menus. New equipment would add capacity for the co-op to offer different further processed foods, and ultimately, it would allow the university to save on prep time and labor. The university would receive a reduced rate when purchasing the value-added goods processed with the co-owned equipment, but the co-op could sell full-price goods to other customers (Moran 2016).

For institutions, this model enables them to access local foods that have undergone processing, so they can use locally grown products for an extended period during the year. They can also save on labor costs because they can access local food that already has been processed. Additionally, this model makes local food costs more competitive, so buyers can better fit local food purchases into their budgets (Mission West Community Development Partners 2021).

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4.7 TRAINING INSTITUTES

To support institutions through planning and implementing farm-to-institution programming, several states have introduced training institutes. Typically formatted as yearlong programs, these institutes combine education with one-on-one assistance available to teams formed by the institutions selected to participate — typically, schools. Nebraska has an institute designed for school teams. Available in the Northeast and New York, Vermont FEED hosts an institute open to schools and early childhood centers. Additionally, the organization offers training to other states interested in using its institute as a model for training in their own states.

Training Blueprint for States

Vermont FEED welcomes other states to create similar institutes, and it offers a *Farm to School Institute Adaptation Program* to help other states apply the institute’s model in their own areas (Vermont FEED a). The program’s purpose is to provide states with tools they can use to implement their own institutes and customize the experience to work for their stakeholders (National Farm to School Network 2021).

States must apply to participate in the adaptation program by first submitting a written application. Vermont FEED then asks top candidates to participate in a virtual interview. Ultimately, the selected states begin their participation by attending a five-day training held

during the Northeast Farm to School Institute. The training teaches participants strategies for recruiting farm-to-school institute participants and coaches, managing logistics and budgets, evaluating the institute and offering a professional learning experience. Plus, given that their training is co-scheduled with the Northeast Farm to School Institute, participants may observe how to execute an institute. States participating in the adaptation program also have an opportunity to invite a school team from their state to attend the Northeast Farm to School Institute (Vermont FEED a).

The learning continues after the five-day training concludes. For a year, Vermont FEED facilitates additional training for the state teams. To participate in the adaptation program, states incur no fees. A \$7,500 stipend helps them to pay for travel and other costs related to their participation (Vermont FEED a).

Nebraska modeled its farm-to-institute institute after the Northeast program. Other states, such as Massachusetts and Mississippi, have also developed institutes based on the Northeast model. Seven states had adaptation efforts underway in 2021. Further, another two or three efforts may begin in 2022 (National Farm to School Network 2021). To participate in 2022, states had a Dec. 18, 2021, deadline to submit applications. Selected states would receive a selection decision notification in January 2022 (Vermont FEED a). In August 2021, Sen. Patrick Leahy announced that he had recommended the U.S. allocate \$5 million to support a National Farm-to-School Institute that would build on the Northeast Farm to School Institute's work (Pasanen 2021).

Northeast

Designed as a yearlong professional development program, the *Northeast Farm to School Institute* allows participants to network and create a plan they can implement to use more local foods and conduct farm-to-school programming. The Northeast Farm to School Institute began in 2010. It's available to school or early childhood centers from New England and New York. Vermont FEED, the institute's host, ties to two nonprofit parent organizations: Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont and Shelburne Farms. Plus, it partners with the National Farm to School Network in Vermont (Vermont FEED b).

5 Tenants of the Northeast Farm to School Institute

The yearlong training program incorporates these five principles into the experience (National Farm to School Network 2021).

Selected schools and child care centers begin their participation in the spring. They each form a team composed of representatives who will complete the institute's activities. When forming institute teams, a single school or early childhood center would recruit four to six members who have a combination of administrative, teaching and school food service responsibilities. To round out the team, schools or early childhood centers may select students, farmers, school nurses, school board members or other interested individuals to participate in their teams. If participating as a school district, then a district should identify a five- to seven-member team and plan to start farm-to-school programming on a small scale — one or two schools (Vermont FEED b).

At a summer retreat, all of the selected teams meet and experience a “deep dive” into their farm-to-school planning (Vermont FEED b). Using the action plan created at the retreat, teams implement their own farm-to-school efforts during the school year (National Farm to School Network 2021). Each team has an assigned coach who’s part of the Farm to School or Early Childhood Network. During the school year, teams meet with their coaches. These coaches support teams as they implement their action plans, and they help participants realign their plans as needed. Learning also continues during the school year as teams participate in monthly “community of practice” education tailored to their specific roles. For example, school food service representatives engage with school food service representatives, and educators engage with their respective peers. The teams assemble again in the spring with other teams within their regions (Vermont FEED b).

Nebraska

In Nebraska, eight schools will participate in the *Nebraska Farm to School Institute* during the 2021-22 school year. Financial support for the institute originated from a USDA Farm to School grant (Nebraska Department of Education). Participating schools receive assistance to create and execute farm-to-school initiatives. In June 2021, the selected schools participated in a virtual one-week event designed to help them plan their 2021-22 farm-to-school programming. Plans may include efforts such as organizing farm visits, including students in gardening or cooking activities and featuring seasonal ingredients in school meals. To give schools support they need to implement their plans, each will have a coach with which to collaborate (Star-Herald).

Teams intended to meet regularly through May 2022 to advance their plans. Mini grants — valued at \$2,000 to \$3,500, depending on the project — may help schools implement their plans. Recipients could allocate mini grant funding to uses such as cafeteria equipment, supplies or staff training; garden materials, equipment and supplies; and experiential education activities (NDE Nutrition Services 2021). Two organizations coordinate the institute: the Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska Extension (Star-Herald).

Any school — district or building — participating in the National School Lunch Program could apply. In the application, the school must identify at least a three-person team to lead the farm-to-school plan and implementation. Teams must include a school administrator and school food service manager. Ideally, a third member would be a teacher or extension contact. Teams could include as many as seven individuals. Other potential team members may include students, community members, farmers, school nurses and parents (NDE Nutrition Services 2021).

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